WILD WEST WEEKLY

A MAGAZINE CONTAINING STORIES, SKETCHES Etc. OF WESTERN LIFE.

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YOUNG WILD WEST AND THE COWBOY KING; OR, TAMING A TEXAS "TERROR".

By AN OLD SCOUT.

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OR,

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CHAPTER I.

THE LARIAT CONTEST ON THE PRAIRIE.

On a broad piece of prairie in the northern part of Texas one fine afternoon in early spring not many years ago, there were gathered some forty-odd men.

Some were on horseback and others were standing and walking about, though the bronchoes grazing near by showed that none of them were without a mount.

A mile off to the right a vast herd of longhorned cattle were peacefully grazing, and with the blue sky and bright sun shining down on the green spring grass it was a scene that a person fresh from the densely populated cities of the East would likely be impressed with.

The men gathered there were cowboys, all of them reckless, jolly rovers of the prairie, who had learned to rough it in the true sense of the word, and who thought nothing of rolling themselves in blankets when the time for sleep came and lying down upon the ground with nothing but the dome of the heavens for a cover.

Cowboys are not different from people who live in cities when it comes to a taste in dressing.

Some are satisfied to go about in a slovenly way and others are right up to the prevailing style and try to make themselves look as neat as possible.

Others, still, dress in a halfway style that shows that they are not exactly too careless or over particular as to how they look.

In this crowd of forty or more these characteristics showed quite plainly.

Some had on blue shirts, some wore red ones and others showed up in stripes and plaids. Breeches of buckskin, bearskin, corduroy and common jean, some well-worn and rather greasy, were worn by them, but all sported broad-brimmed felt hats ranging in style from the natty cowboy dress hat to the Mexican sombrero.

The cartridge belt with holsters hanging from it was not missing on one of them, and in many cases the spurs rattled at the heels of their boots.

The cause of this gathering of cowboys was that one particular individual, who went by the name of the Cowboy King, had offered a hundred dollars to any man who could equal him at throwing a lasso.

He was a big, giant of a fellow, muscular and raw-boned, with a face that was rather difficult to read.

He might have been good, bad or indifferent, as far as judging him by his facial expression was concerned.

But he seemed to be in a very jolly mood to-day, and his loud guffaw could be heard above all the rest.

This man's proper name was Henry Diggs, but all over that section of country he was known as Horse Shoe Harry, the Cowboy King.

He belonged to Dixon's Ranch, as did about half the men who were there, and the spot selected for the lasso-throwing was a neutral one, since it was the dividing line between the property owned by Dixon and that of a man named Bangs.

These two ranches were about the biggest to be found in that part of Texas at the time of which we write, and there was a certain rivalry between the owners which had cropped out among the cowboys and punchers.

Horse Shoe Harry had heard that there was a fellow on Bangs' ranch who was an expert with the lariat.

He was a newcomer there, and went by the name of Smiles, probably because he almost always had a smile on his face.

The Cowboy King, as he had been nicknamed, wanted to

see what this new man could do, and that was why he had offered a hundred dollars to anyone who could equal him at throwing the lasso.

"Boys," the big fellow said, casting a sweeping glance at those around him, "I reckon you all know what we come here fur. We're at ther dividin' line between ther two ranches that we represent, 'cause it is always proper to have contests pulled off on ground that's neutral. Here's ther hundred dollars I offered; now where's ther man that wants it?"

He pulled a roll from his pocket and then cast a searching glance among the cowboys.

"I'm ther man as wants that hundred!" spoke up a wiry, under-sized fellow of perhaps thirty-five, who was dressed in a style that was half American cowboy, half Mexican. "I'm ther hairpin what's come up here to show ther Cowboy King that he don't know it all yet. I'm only a little feller, but I've got a good eye an' a strong arm. If I don't beat you at your favorite game I'll be ther worst s'prised feller in all Texas!"

"You talk like a jayhawker from Indianny, or some other state ther other side of ther Mississippi!" retorted the Cowboy King. "Why, I reckon I can't be beat at this game. Wow-w-w!"

As he spoke he let go the lariat he had been holding coiled in his hand and the noose settled about the little man's body in a twinkling.

"Wow."

A quick jerk and he was pulled forward and went sprawling on the ground.

A burst of laughter went up from the men from Dixon's ranch and those from Bangs' looked at each other as much as to say that Smiles would not be in it.

But the little cowboy worked himself clear of the noose with remarkable quickness and leaped to his feet.

"That was putty good, I reckon," he observed, smiling broader than ever. "Look out for yourself!"

His own lariat had been in his hand ready for use when he stepped up to announce that he was the man who wanted the hundred, and now he simply made a single swing and let it go.

Horse Shoe Harry saw it coming, and with a loud guffaw he stepped aside to let it go past him.

Then something happened that not only surprised him, but the rest of the crowd as well.

Smiles gave a quick jerk and the loop of the lasso changed its course.

With a snake-like motion it dropped over the big man's head!

"Gug-gug!" he gasped, as it tightened about his neck and he was pulled to his hands and knees. "Good boy! You sorter fooled me, little feller."

"That's all right," retorted Smiles. "I come here to git that hundred from yer, an' I'll jest bet you sixty dollars, which is all I've got, that I'll git it!"

Again the Cowboy King gave vent to a burst of merriment.

"Jest hear him, boys!" he cried. "Why, when he said that he looked jest like a Gulf shrimp that's been jest about half pickled! Wow! But ain't this great!"

"Are yer goin' to take my bet?" asked Smiles, who had not ceased grinning once and looked now as though he was going to break into a hearty laugh at any moment.

"Will I take ther bet!" retorted the Cowboy King. "You kin bet I will! Who'll yer have to hold ther money?"

"I'll take your word fur it; I reckon you kin take mine, too."

"Sartin! But when it's all over, an' I've won I don't want no squealin'. I ain't ther one as will stand anything like that."

"An' I ain't ther one as will do any squealin'."

"All right, you pickled shrimp. Now I'll show yer somethin' that's liable to make you disgusted with yerself."

"There ain't no man livin' as kin make me feel disgusted with myself, 'cause I'm of ther opinion that I'm made up on a plan that's jest about perfect as kin be."

"Well, you'll find you ain't, when it comes to slingin' a lariat with me."

Horse Shoe Harry walked over to his horse, which was a big, powerful-looking gray, and swung himself in the saddle.

As big as he was, he had a very easy and graceful way about him, and on the back of the horse he made a fine appearance.

One of his followers quickly unsaddled an ugly-looking broncho and turned him loose on the prairie.

The cowboy let out a yell that could be heard half a mile, and then started after the animal, swinging his lariat.

He bore down upon the liberated steed, and when he was close enough he let go his lasso.

Whizz!

The loop settled over the broncho's head and he had him in no time.

"Huh!" exclaimed Smiles; "that ain't nothin'."

"Jest wait!" spoke up one of the boys from Dixon's. "He'll do that four more times, an' each one will catch ther cayuse around a different leg."

"Oh!"

The Cowboy King released his lasso, let the broncho go again, and in less than two minutes he caught him by the right foreleg and threw him.

Then he kept on until he had captured the steed five times, just as the cowboy said he would.

And he never missed once!

But Smiles did not appear uneasy.

"Is that all you want me to do?" he asked, as the big man came galloping back.

"Yes, I reckon if you do that you kin have ther hundred," was the reply.

"An' ther sixty we've bet, too?"

"Yes, you pickled shrimp. Now let yourself go!"

Smiles got right down to business.

When the broncho was let go he waited about the same

length of time as his predecessor had done and then very neatly caught the animal about the neck.

The contingent from Bangs' ranch began to look confident.

They all knew it was not an easy thing to do, but the little cowboy had only been on the ranch a few days, and in that short time he had convinced them that he was an expert with the lariat.

The next attempt he made was as successful as the first.

The Cowboy King had a rather peculiar expression on his face now.

It was evident that he was getting just the least bit worried.

The little man lassoed the steed for the third time, and with as much ease and grace as the big fellow had done it.

And so it was the fourth time.

The last time was the looping of the left hind leg, and when the broncho, which was now about as wild and ugly as it could be, started off, Smiles let out a yell that was meant to terrorize the animal and tantalize the Cowboy King at the same time.

He was successful in both.

But he was all business, too.

If he missed this time he would lose, and Horse Shoe Harry would hold the undisputed title of the Cowboy King.

The little man, still keeping the smile on his face, nerved himself for the task ahead of him.

His opportunity came and he made the fling.

The lariat whipped through the air like a zigzag streak of lightning, and then——

He missed!

The broncho went galloping over the plain and a wild yell went up from the Cowboy King and his friends.

Smiles ceased to smile for the time being and rode back to the group of cowboys looking rather dejected.

Horse Shoe Harry was just about to ride off and capture the broncho when he saw three horsemen riding that way.

Suddenly one of them, who was mounted on a splendid sorrel, switched off from his companions and made for the running cayuse.

The cowboys had been so interested in watching the contestants that they had failed to note the coming of the three strangers until they were within a quarter of a mile of them.

"That feller looks like a boy," observed the Cowboy King, as he shaded his eyes with his hand and watched him bearing swiftly down upon the riderless broncho.

"Jingo!" exclaimed one of the others; "but he rides like a Comanche, boys! Did you ever see ther beat of that?"

The next instant all hands held their breath.

When he was within about the length of his lariat from the running broncho the dashing-looking horseman let go at it.

The lasso flew through the air, there was a sudden stop of the sorrel and the broncho went down in a heap!

"Great snakes!" cried Smiles, standing in his stirrups and taking off his sombrero. "That's ther longest throw I ever seen made! Who kin it be, boys?"

"I reckon we'll know who he is," retorted the Cowboy King, who immediately got jealous and angry at Wild for what he had done. "Jest wait till I git through with him! I ain't only ther Cowboy King, but I'm a Texas Terror, an' don't you furgit it!"

CHAPTER II.

YOUNG WILD WEST AND THE COWBOY KING.

A few minutes later the three strangers rode up to the group of cowboys, the dashing-looking young fellow who had lassoed the broncho leading the way.

All three were striking in appearance.

Attired in fancy hunting-suits of buckskin and armed after the usual fashion of men of the plains, they rode their horses with the ease and grace of an Apache Indian.

Two of them were nothing more than boys in looks, though they were full grown, no doubt, and the other was a man in the neighborhood of thirty.

One of the boys was as handsome and athletic a young fellow as one would wish to look upon.

His long chestnut hair hung over his shapely shoulders and his dark eyes shone with honesty and determination.

The other boy was also a handsome young fellow, but wore his light brown hair rather short.

The man, who made up the trio, was tall and very straight, with long, black hair and a mustache of the same hue, and one look at his bronzed face would have told that he was a veteran of the mountains and plains of the wild West.

The boy with the long chestnut hair was the one who had so neatly captured the broncho, and as he brought his sorrel steed to a halt he nodded at the gathering and said:

"How are you, gentlemen? Been having a little fun, I guess, haven't you?"

"I reckon somethin' like that," answered Horse Shoe Harry, with a swagger, as he stepped up and took charge of the broncho. "I am ther Cowboy King, an' I'm a regular Texas Terror, too! Now, who might you be?"

"Oh, I go by the name of Young Wild West," was the reply, in a tone that told how cool and collected the speaker was. "This young fellow to my left is Jim Dart, and the gentleman on my right is Cheyenne Charlie. But don't let us interrupt your fun; go right on."

"I reckon you fellers couldn't interrupt much, anyway," retorted the big man, who was plainly bent on picking a quarrel with the newcomers. "You look putty dashin'-like, I'll admit, but I don't believe either one of yer draws any more water than a birchbark canoe."

"You seem to have a rather poor opinion of us," said Young Wild West, with a smile. "What's the matter with you? Haven't lost anything, have you?"

"No, I reckon I ain't lost anything, but I'm liable to right away, though. I'm liable to lose my temper an' give you a trimmin'."

"Please don't do that, for I am quite sure that I don't need to be trimmed."

The friends of the big cowboy looked amazed when the dashing boy spoke in such a cool way to him, and those from Bangs' ranch appeared to be rather pleased.

"See here!" and the Cowboy King spoke in a very harsh tone of voice. "Didn't I tell yer that I was a Texas Terror?"

"Well, I am sure that I am not afraid of any Texas Terror that ever put up a bluff, and my friends are not, either."

"You ain't, hey?" and the big fellow made a motion as though to seize the boy and pull him from his horse.

But before his hand caught him Young Wild West struck him a smart slap right across the mouth, and the Texas Terror staggered back a couple of paces, hardly realizing what had happened.

By the time he had recovered himself the handsome young fellow was on the ground before him.

"Now, you insulting hound, since you have been trying so hard to pick a fight with me, just go ahead! I'll guarantee that you'll get something you don't want in less than thirty seconds!"

A cry of amazement intermingled with applause went up from the cowboys.

This was the greatest nerve they had ever seen displayed, and they could hardly believe their eyes.

Horse Shoe Harry must have weighed seventy-five pounds more than the boy, and yet he had dared to slap him and challenge him to fight.

Neither of Young Wild West's partners said a word, but they looked as though they were ready for anything that might turn up.

The self-styled Cowboy King was a rank coward, after all, for when he saw the young fellow standing there ready to hit him at an instant's notice, he wilted.

"Well, by jingo!" he exclaimed, forcing a smile. "I was jest tryin' you, young feller. You're made out of ther right kind of stuff, an' I'll gamble on it. I wouldn't offer to hurt a boy with such grit as you've got, not if you give me good cause to. Boys, take off your hats to ther gamest young feller what ever rode over ther grazin' lands of Texas!"

He took off his sombrero and led in a cheer that could have been heard a long distance, since every cowboy there joined in.

"Thank you, boys," said Young Wild West, when silence was restored. "I am very glad to receive such a reception. Now, if you don't mind, I would like to know what you were up to when the broncho got away."

"Well, I'll tell yer in a very few words," answered the big rascal who called himself a Texas Terror. "That little half-pickled shrimp over there thought as how he could throw a lariat as good as I kin, an' he tried it an' didn't do it. I was goin' to give him a hundred dollars if he done what I could, an' I meant it, too. He was quite sartin he could do it, I guess, fur he bet all ther money he had, which was sixty dollars, that he would take my hundred. He didn't do it, an' that's why you had ther chance of lassoin' ther cayuse."

"I come mighty near doin' it, though," spoke up Smiles, whose face was fairly beaming, and had been ever since the big bully got the slap in the mouth. "If I had another chance I reckon I could do it."

"Well, my offer is still open. I'll make any man a present of a hundred dollars what kin equal me at slingin' a lariat."

The Cowboy King looked around with an air of defiance till his eyes finally rested upon Young Wild West.

"I reckon you're somethin' on that line," he added.

"Well, yes, I am," was the reply. "But I don't know as I want your hundred dollars very bad. Another thing, I don't want to interfere with your fun. I caught the broncho because I thought I was doing you a favor, that's all."

The big cowboy who called himself a Texas Terror evidently thought Young Wild West was afraid to accept the offer, so he concluded to show him what he could do, anyhow.

"You fellers ain't in sich an awful hurry, are yer?" he asked.

"Oh, our time is our own; we can go and come when we please," was the reply.

"Well, I'll jest do ther thing over ag'in, then—ther trick that ther new man at Bangs' ranch couldn't do."

"Go ahead. We are always ready to learn new tricks."

Another broncho, which was not quite so ugly as the first had been, was brought forward and turned loose.

Then the Cowboy King started in and lassoed the beast five consecutive times in the same way he had done before.

"What do you think of that?" he called out when he had finished. "Ain't I entitled to ther name of ther Cowboy King?"

"You certainly know how to handle a lariat," replied Young Wild West.

"I think I can do that if you'll give me another chance," spoke up Smiles, stepping forward. "You needn't give me no hundred dollars if I do; I jest want ter show you that I'm jest as good as you are with ther lariat."

"All right, you half-pickled shrimp! Go ahead an' try it. If you do it I'll keep my word an' hand you over a hundred."

The little cowboy got ready and the broncho was turned loose once more.

He got along all right until the fourth time.

Then he made a miss of it.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Cowboy King, alias the Texas Terror, and his crowd joined in.

"There ain't no use, Smiles," said one of the little man's friends; "he kin beat yer, so that's all there is to it."

"Well, I'll bet I'll be able to do it afore another week,"

was the reply. "I don't allow that there's a man livin' what kin do any more with a lariat than I kin—unless," and he looked at our hero, "it's Young Wild West. He sartinly made ther longest throw I ever seen made when he caught ther cayuse as he was comin' up here."

"Maybe you want to try ther trick, Young Wild West?" said Horse Shoe Harry, turning to the dashing young fellow.

"Why, you don't have any idea that I can't do it, do you?"

"Well, I'm ther Cowboy King, that's all!"

"No, that isn't all. You said you was the Cowboy King and a Texas Terror, too."

"Well, that's right. An' my real name is Henry Diggs, though everybody calls me Horse Shoe Harry."

"I reckon they calls him Horse Shoe Harry 'cause his clodhoppers looks more like hoofs than feet," spoke up Cheyenne Charlie, who had kept still as long as he could.

It was plain that the scout took very little stock in the big cowboy.

"That's quite a compliment," said the Cowboy King, forcing a smile, though it was plain to everybody there that he felt more like shooting than he did laughing.

"Oh, that's all right!" retorted Charlie. "Any measly coyote with as many names as you've got oughter be complimented, I reckon."

Smiles laughed right out at this and nearly every man from Bangs' ranch smiled.

But those from Dixon's did not seem to be amused.

Our hero noticed this.

"I guess you fellows don't all belong to the same ranch?" he said, questioningly.

"Nope!" answered Smiles. "We're from Bangs' ranch, which is five miles below here, an' them fellers belong to Dixon's, which is about four miles over that way. This spot is where ther two properties jine together."

"Ah! I see. You thought it would be a good idea to have the contest on ground that was neutral."

"That's it."

The big cowboy with the various nicknames acted as though he thought Young Wild West was bluffing.

"Don't you want to try an' do ther trick?" he asked.

"Well, yes. If you fellows want to see it done I'll do it for you. I am not a cowboy, and never worked as one, but I know a few things about riding a horse and lassoing cattle and wild horses. But understand me! I don't want you to drop the title if I beat you at slinging a lariat."

"Oh, I reckon there's no danger of that, anyhow."

"This world is full of surprises, my friend."

"I know that."

"Well, let the broncho go!"

Young Wild West began to get his lariat in shape as he spoke.

The Cowboy King let the broncho go, striking it with his coiled lariat as he did so.

When the animal was about fifty yards away Young Wild West started after it.

He very easily caught the frightened steed about the neck, and in less than a minute had it under control.

Then he liberated the broncho and gave it a chance to get well away.

The cowboys drew up close to watch the dashing boy, who was working in such an easy and matter-of-fact way.

Wild took his time, and in less than the time it had taken the big cowboy he accomplished exactly what he had done.

The face of the Cowboy King fell when he saw that he had met his match at throwing the lariat.

He had already found out that he had met his match in another way, but he had figured on beating anyone at his great game.

"You may be a Texas Terror," said our hero, when it was all over, "but I hardly think you can do anything with a horse or lariat that I can't do. But I shan't go around bragging that I am as good as the Cowboy King at the game; I am not built that way. You can have the honor."

"Well, I reckon that I'm entitled to hold it till I'm beat," was the reply.

"Oh, certainly you are."

"Maybe you think you kin beat me?"

"Never mind about that now."

"All right; let it go as it is. We might meet ag'in, an' then somethin' else might happen."

This was said in a significant way and almost any meaning might have been taken from it.

Young Wild West knew that it meant that if the big villain got the chance he would put an end to him in a hurry.

Though he was apparently in a good humor, he knew full well that he would not forget the slap he had received in a hurry.

"Gentlemen, we've come down from Dakota to buy up some wild horses," said Young Wild West, turning to the gang that belonged to Bangs' ranch. "It strikes me that Bangs is one of the names we have in regard to horses. Has your boss got any?"

"I reckon he has!" spoke up one of the cowboys. "He's got somethin' like a thousand of 'em in one herd."

"Good! He is just the man we want to see, then. We'll ride over to the house."

Waving their hands to the cowboys, the three rode off in the direction Smiles had indicated when he was talking to them.

CHAPTER III.

OUR FRIENDS GET ACQUAINTED.

Young Wild West and his two partners had come to Texas for the purpose of buying up a few carloads of horses, as our hero stated to the cowboys.

They were quite wealthy, being the owners of several

gold and silver mines, but they could not settle down and live quietly on what they had earned.

Young Wild West was one of the sort who was never happy unless he was running some sort of a risk.

He had been through all sorts of perilous adventures, and his hairbreadth escapes had been many.

And Cheyenne Charlie and Jim Dart always went with him and stuck to him, no matter what happened.

They had all been born and reared in the wild West, so it was no wonder that they were up to about everything that was going.

But somehow Wild had always excelled all comers in his feats of daring, quickness and strength.

He was not one who followed, but a born leader in everything.

He had earned the titles of Champion Deadshot of the West and Prince of the Saddle, and he was also called the Boss Boy Miner of the Black Hills.

The dashing young fellow turned in the saddle as they rode away from the group of cowboys and remarked:

"I guess that big cowboy with the string of nicknames don't like me very much now. He is just the sort of a fellow one needs to watch. He talks with apparent sincerity, but means just the opposite. It was really wonderful how he turned it off when I struck him, though. Not one man in a thousand could have acted that way! I know just as well as I am seated on the back of Spitfire that he felt more like stabbing me to the heart than he did in laughing it off and making out he was simply trying me to see whether I had any nerve or not."

"Yes, an' I know it, too," spoke up Jim Dart. "He has a way of concealing his feelings and swallowing his anger. That is sometimes a good trait in a man, but in his case it is not. It is his cowardice that enables him to do it so neatly."

"That's what's ther matter," spoke up Cheyenne Charlie. "Ther measly coyote is about ther biggest coward I ever seen! But I'll bet he wouldn't stop about knifin' a feller he didn't like, providin' he got ther chance."

"Well, I guess we all think about the same, as far as Horse Shoe Harry, the Cowboy King and Texas Terror, goes," observed Young Wild West. "As we are going to remain around this part of the country for a week or so, we must be on the watch for the fellow and see that he doesn't catch us napping."

"You kin bet your boots we will!" declared the scout.

The three rode on, and soon came in sight of the buildings belonging to Bangs' ranch.

"It looks as though it might be quite a prosperous ranch," said Jim Dart, as he surveyed the surroundings with a critical eye.

"Yes," retorted Wild. "Some of the Texas ranches are very thriving concerns, and this appears to be one of that sort."

They rode right up to the house and dismounted.

As they did so a greaser, who was evidently a servant about the place, came out and stood before them.

"Tell Mr. Bangs we would like to see him," said Wild.

"Coma rye in!" was the reply.

Before they had a chance to accept the invitation a big, raw-boned man appeared.

"Tony, you lazy hound!" exclaimed the man, "why in thunder didn't you bring ther strangers inside? Git out now, or I'll put my number 'leven into yer! Come right on, gentlemen! Don't mind ther greaser. He'll l'arn some manners arter awhile, I reckon."

But the servant did not move very fast, even when his employer made a kick at him.

It was not his style to move rapidly, anyway.

"Are you Mr. Bangs?" Wild asked, sizing the man up and coming to the conclusion that he was a pretty good sort of fellow, and full of business, at that.

"Yes, I'm Bangs," was the reply. "I reckon my name's Bangs 'cause I've always made so much noise through my life. But trot right in, strangers. What kin I do fur yer, anyhow? Ther best in ther house ain't none too good fur yer!"

"Well, we came down from Dakota to see about buying some horses," Wild observed, as he took a seat on a bench near the door, and not going inside because the host did not lead the way, but sat on a stool near the door.

"How many did yer want ter buy?"

"Oh, about six hundred head."

"Well, I reckon you couldn't have struck a better place, then. I'm jest ther hairpin what kin fix yer up!"

Then they had a talk that lasted over half an hour, at the expiration of which our hero came to the conclusion that it was more than likely he could do business with the ranchman.

It was getting late in the afternoon by this time, so the mistress of the ranch insisted on getting a good supper ready for them.

She stated rather emphatically that it would be a "good" one, so they thought it would not be good policy to refuse.

As they rode a long distance that day they were very hungry, anyhow, and where can a hungry man appease his appetite better than at the table of a well-stocked ranch?

While the meal was being prepared by the good wife our friends learned from the ranchman that the town of Gosling was just ten miles to the south of the ranch.

They had heard there was a town somewhere near by, and they intended to stop there all night.

Young Wild West had stopped at the ranch to do business with Bangs, and he resolved that it was best not to accept his hospitality for any more than a meal just at that stage of the game.

It might be that he would find a chance to better himself in buying the horses he wanted elsewhere, and then he would be under no obligations to the man.

They had a very good supper at the ranch, and then, in spite of the very pressing invitation to stay, they set out for the town.

There was a good, level road over the prairie leading to it, so it would not be a great while before they got there.

It was only a little past six when they set out.

The cowboys were just coming in to get their supper, and when Smiles caught sight of them he threw up his hat and uttered a cheer.

"Hooray fur Young Wild West!" he shouted. "I reckon he could beat ther Cowboy King if I couldn't."

The rest yelled so loud that the ranchman was surprised.

"Be sure an' ride over in ther mornin' to take a look at my cayuses," he said.

Wild assured him that they would, and then they rode on.

"We'll be down to Goslin' to licker up a little by an' by, an' we'll see yer there!" called out Smiles.

"I reckon there'll be some fun there if that other gang happens to show up, too," remarked Cheyenne Charlie. "A little liquor will start a fight between 'em, I'll bet!"

"That will do it if anything will," Wild retorted. "No matter how good a disposition a man has, a little whisky will work him up into what he calls fighting trim. But when a man is drunk he can't fight near as well as he can when he's sober."

"That's right," said Jim. "But a sober man don't want to fight generally, unless he is compelled to."

Halfway to the town they overtook a rather curious-looking rig on the road.

It was a covered wagon drawn by a team of mules and the driver was one of the traveling venders of "Yankee notions" so often met with in that part of the country.

It was pretty dark, so our three friends got pretty close to him before they saw the team.

"Hello, there!" came from the front of the wagon as they got opposite it. "Where be you folks a-goin'?"

"To town," answered Wild. "Where are you bound?"

"Tu taown, too," was the quick reply. "Well, I'll see you there, an' mebbe I kin sell you somethin'. I'm a travelin' merchant, I am."

"All right, boss. We'll see you in Gosling."

"I reckon it must be a young tawn that we're headin' fur," went on the peddler.

"Why?" asked Cheyenne Charlie.

"Well, it's only a Goslin' that we're headin' fur; in a year from now it'll be a goose. Ha, ha, ha! That's putty smart, ain't it? Oh, there ain't any man what kin git ahead of Simon Slow, I kin tell you! My name is Slow an' I hail from Slowtown, Vermont, but I ain't so awful slow, fur all thet!"

Our friends laughed at the man's remarks, and then they soon left him behind.

When they reached the town they found it was quite a big place.

Its population must have been in the neighborhood of six hundred, and there were some pretty good-looking stores there.

"I hadn't no idea that Gosling was as large a place as this," Jim commented, as he looked around him.

"Oh, it'll be bigger yet when it grows up to be a goose," said the scout, with a chuckle.

"That's it, Charlie," laughed Wild. "Now you're even. The peddler got it on you and you have turned it over to Jim."

The majority of the houses and cabins that made up the town were in a bunch, but there were quite a few scattered about the outskirts.

Our friends rode up to the best looking place that had a sign on it declaring it was a hotel and dismounted.

There was the usual crowd of men hanging about the hotel that is to be found wherever a person goes through that region of the country, and they all looked keenly at the three dashing riders.

"Some fellers come over to go in ther shootin' match to-morrer, I reckon," Wild heard a grizzled old fellow remark as they went inside.

"Hello, landlord!" said our hero, looking around and finding a bald-headed man seated on a high stool behind the counter. "How about accommodations for the night for ourselves and horses?"

"You've struck jest ther right place," was the reply, as the man slipped from the stool and got ready for business.

There were only one or two in the place, and business seemed to be rather dull just then.

But by the time our friends had made arrangements to stay over night at the hotel there was a dozen or more inside.

One of them was the whiskered man who had remarked something about a shooting match on the morrow, and he stepped up to Charlie in a familiar way and said:

"I reckon you've come over to go in the match to-morrow, hain't yer?"

"What match?" asked the scout.

"Why, hain't yer heerd about it? We're goin' to have a shootin' match here in town, an' it's fur ther benefit of ther widder of Tom Jacoby. I thunk right away when I seen you fellers that you come around jest to take a hand in the shoot. You all looks like good shots, I must say. I've got an eye fur some things, an' I says as how you fellers are good shots."

"Well, I reckon we're about as good as ther average," retorted the scout. "But we didn't know nothin' about a shootin' match. It might be that we'll go in it, though, if there's no objections."

"Oh, there won't be no objections! It's fur ther benefit of ther widder, you know, an' ther more we git in it ther better it will be fur her—ther more money she'll git."

The grizzled old fellow was a great talker, and when Charlie finally asked him what he was going to have, his face broke into a happy smile.

"Lightnin' is mine," he said. "Whew! But I'll bet you're ther slickest shot in ther bunch."

Wild and Jim smiled.

They knew the man had been simply talking for a drink all along.

But whatever Charlie thought, he was not going to let the man have the opinion that he was the best shot in the bunch.

"There's ther best shot of us three," he observed, point-

ing to Wild. "He's ther Champion Deadshot of ther West."

"Then he must be Young Wild West," spoke up the bald-headed man who owned the place.

"That's jest who he is, boss!"

"Shake!" exclaimed the landlord, putting out his hand to our hero. "I've heerd a lot about you."

The rest of the men in the place looked very much surprised.

"Ther Champeen Deadshot of ther West, hey?" remarked the grizzled old fellow, as he wiped his mouth with the sleeve of his coat after he had swallowed his drink. "Well, I reckon there'll be a lively time at ther shoot to-morrer, then. There's three or four fellers what I knows of who thinks they're champeens."

Pretty soon several cowboys rode up to the hotel and came into the bar-room.

They were from Bangs' ranch, and when they saw our three friends they let out a whoop.

Smiles, the little man who had been defeated by the Cowboy King, was among them, and he promptly proposed three cheers for Young Wild West.

They were given with a will, and then the hangers-on about the bar were more astonished than ever.

The cheering had scarcely died out when several more horsemen stopped in front of the place.

They were the cowboys from Dixon's, and it struck Wild that there would be a lively time before long.

CHAPTER IV.

THE COWBOY KING GETS IT GOOD AND HARD.

The gang from Dixon's ranch came in the bar of the hotel with a rush.

Among them was the big cowboy with the several nicknames.

"Make room there fur us!" he bawled. "We're all as dry as fish outer water!"

Some of the men got out of the way in a hurry.

It was quite likely that they knew the Cowboy King and were a little afraid of him.

But those from Bangs' ranch did not move out of the way.

They had seen Young Wild West slap the big Cowboy King in the face, and now they had a different opinion of him.

Though he was no doubt powerful and could shoot with great skill, he was but a coward, after all.

But whisky will make a man temporarily brave sometimes.

The Cowboy King began filling up without loss of time.

Wild had an idea that he would say something to him before long, so he waited.

Horse Shoe Harry got four drinks in him, and then he suddenly stepped to the center of the room and let out a whoop.

"I'm a regular Texas Terror!" he yelled. "Them that didn't know it afore knows it now. Whoop! I'm liable to have a spell in a minute, an' then things will begin to fly!"

The landlord looked uneasy and so did several of the men in the place.

But our friends only smiled.

They understood him perfectly.

One of the cowboys invited everybody to drink, and that shut up the big blusterer for a minute.

But he had no sooner swallowed his drink than he turned to Smiles, the little man, and said:

"You are the shrimp what tried to do ther same as I did with a lariat to-day, ain't yer?" he bellowed out.

"Yes, I tried to do it, an' I reckon I'll be able to do it ther next time I try it," was the reply.

"Well, you'll have to grow a little bigger afore you kin throw a lariat with me. You're a putty good one fur yer size, there's no use in rubbin' that out! But when it comes to competin' with ther Cowboy King, it's different."

"How about Young Wild West?" asked Smiles, who was not taking the least bit of water.

"Well, he done about ther same as I done, I'll admit. But there's things I kin do that him, nor no one else kin do, an' I'll gamble on it!"

"Well, I suppose that's true."

"True! Why, of course it's true. I'm ther Cowboy King! An' ain't I ther Texas Terror?"

As he said this he brought his fist down upon the bar with a bang.

Two glasses and a bottle were upset and the proprietor looked more uneasy than ever.

"I kin do more with a horse an' a lariat an' a gun than any man livin'!" went on the cowboy. "I don't claim to be sich an awful good rifle shot, but jest ther same, I expect to win ther match to-morrer. When it comes to six-shooters, I'm first, second an' third all in a bunch."

Young Wild West heard all he said, but he acted as though he was not paying the least attention.

He calmly smoked a cigar and chatted with his partners, just as though a blustering cowboy, bent on picking a muss, was the last thing to be found.

The Cowboy King evidently thought he was making great headway in cowing the crowd.

It is just probable that he was getting to think that he really had been lenient with Young Wild West when he laughed it off after receiving a slap in the mouth from the boy.

At any rate, it is quite certain that he believed his friends thought he had acted a very generous part when he did not light into the boy and make mincemeat of him.

"Come, landlord!" cried the Texas Terror; "it's your turn to ask ther boys. We're all good customers of yourn, an' you ought to appreciate it."

"I certainly do appreciate it," answered the landlord. "Pete, jest put out ther drinks on ther house."

The bartender obeyed.

By this time several of the crowd were getting rather hilarious.

One of them started singing a rollicking song and others began dancing about the bar-room.

Some of the boys from Bangs' ranch joined in.

They had always been on good terms with the cowboys belonging to the other ranch, so there was nothing in the way of their acting that way.

But none of them had a very big opinion of the Cowboy King since what had taken place that afternoon.

Horse Shoe Harry got right in with the rest.

He managed to work his way around until he got close to Smiles.

Then he suddenly caught hold of him and lifted him off his feet.

"Look out!" he yelled. "I have got ther half-cooked shrimp what thought he could handle ther lariat as good as I could. I'm goin' to waltz with him, boys!"

Though the little man had no idea that he could whip the big one in a fight, he was not a coward, by any means.

As soon as he got his footing he butted the Cowboy King in the stomach.

It was a hard shove that he gave, and it was a sudden one, too.

The result was that Horse Shoe Harry let go of him and sat down upon the floor with a thump that jarred the building.

The villain was so inflamed from the drink he had taken that he lost his natural coolness.

"You sneakin' little shrimp!" he bawled. "I'll shoot yer as full of holes as a pepper-box fur that!"

He got upon his feet and backed to the wall, jerking a brace of six-shooters from his belt as he did so.

Then it was that our hero interfered.

"Stop!" he cried. "If you fire a single shot I'll take a hand in the game!"

The eyes of the Texas Terror flashed fire.

Then, without a word, he made a motion as though he was going to let the boy have a bullet.

Crack!

Young Wild West pulled his revolver from the holster and fired as quick as a flash.

With a sharp cry of pain, the blustering cowboy dropped the revolver he had been in the act of firing.

Crack!

Down went the one his left hand was clutching.

"There!" exclaimed the boy, a smile playing about his lips. "I guess you'll need a couple of pieces of court-plaster, that's all. When I shoot I never miss. Boys, I simply touched his knuckles, but he certainly did drop his shooters, didn't he?"

"I should reckon he did!" exclaimed one of the men from Bangs' ranch. "Thunder! but that jest beat anything I ever seen!"

"Well, it was easy enough," was the reply. "If a fellow always covers what he wants to hit before he pulls the trigger the bullet is bound to get there."

Horse Shoe Harry was sucking his knuckles alternately.

There was nothing that could be called a bad wound about them, but he had been stung, though.

"That was what I calls putty good, Young Wild West," he remarked. "I ain't got nothin' more to say jest at present."

"Well, if you intend to say anything you had better out with it now," was the cool retort.

"Let it drop. You're only a boy, you know, an' I don't want to have trouble with boys."

"Maybe you wanter have a little trouble with a feller about your own age, then?" spoke up Cheyenne Charlie, who had been doing his best to keep still, but got to the limit just at this moment. "I ain't as big as you are, but I reckon I kin lick a dozen such measly coyotes as you, one at a time."

"I'll bet a hundred you can't throw me!" was the quick reply.

"I'll go you!"

The Cowboy King appeared to be delighted.

Here was a chance to drop the question with Young Wild West, and as he really had an idea that he could best anyone in the room, when it came to wrestling, he was suited exactly.

The scout quickly produced the hundred and placed it in the hands of the landlord.

The big cowboy covered it very quickly, and, kicking his revolvers in a corner, he placed his hunting-knife beside them.

"Now," said he, licking his knuckles once more, "I'm ready for you!"

"All right!" answered Charlie. "Jest let yourself go!"

There were no further preliminaries.

The two men came together with wonderful quickness.

Charlie was not as expert at wrestling as Wild was, but he knew a great deal about the game, just the same.

He got a waist-hold and promptly started in to get the feet of his opponent off the floor.

But the cowboy was as strong as a young bull, and he made every effort to keep his footing.

Back and forth the men swayed.

Giants they were in strength, and there was not one in the room who did not fully realize that it was a bout such as few have a chance to witness.

For two minutes they kept at it, neither gaining the least advantage.

Then Charlie, by an almost superhuman effort, succeeded in doing what he was striving for.

He got his opponent's feet off the floor!

Whizz—thud!

Down they went to the floor!

But Cheyenne Charlie was on top.

They had no sooner struck than he had both shoulders of the under man on the floor, too.

"I reckon you're down," said the scout, as he slipped from the hold that was upon him and got up.

Horse Shoe Harry remained there a second or two and then got up.

"That's once," he said. "But you can't do it ag'in."

"Well, I'll try to, anyhow."

"All right."

Once more they sprang for each other.

This time Charlie got the right hold at the start.

The Cowboy King had lost his head.

Bang!

He went down so quickly that he hardly knew what happened to him.

"I reckon that'll do," said the scout. "I kin throw all sich fellers as you easy enough."

Horse Shoe Harry, alias the Cowboy King and Texas Terror, got up, and, without a word, left the place.

Five minutes later all the gang from Dixon's had followed his example.

They went over to a rather tough-looking saloon that was about a hundred feet up the street on the opposite side.

As might be supposed, the big villain, who had been in the habit of having things his own way so long, was in anything but a pleasant frame of mind.

He had lost a hundred dollars, but as he was a sort of foreman for Dixon and was lucky at gambling, he had more money.

"Give us a drink," he said to the rough-looking man behind the bar. "I'm in an awful bad humor jest about now."

"What's ther trouble, Harry?" asked the man, as he hurried to accommodate them.

"Oh, three strangers have come along jest fur ther purpose of tryin' to make me lose ther titles I claim."

"Is that so?"

"Yes."

"What have they been doin' to yer?"

"Oh, shootin' my pistols out of my hands an' throwin' me at wrastlin', that's all!"

"That's all, hey? Well, I should calculate that was enough. How did it happen, Harry?"

The villain told the story just as it had happened.

"But I'll fix 'em afore to-morrer night," he added. "Young Wild West an' his pards may think they're wonders, but I'll down 'em, jest as sure as I'm a Texas Terror!"

A few minutes later he looked at the rather dilapidated clock that hung over the bar and gave a start.

"Boys," he observed, turning to his comrades, "I made up my mind that I was goin' to call on Calico Nell. I've always set her down as ther gal I'm goin' to hitch up to, but I heard yesterday that she was smilin' on another feller. I jest want to find out who ther feller is, an' then you kin bet somethin' will happen when I runs across him. Oh, I'm ther Texas Terror yet, an' don't yer furgit it!"

Telling the cowboys to wait for him there, he left the place.

Not far distant on the same side of the street was a little store where muslin, calico, ribbons and such articles as appeal to the feminine taste were sold.

The Cowboy King hurried to the place.

It so happened that there were no customers there just then, and a neat-looking young lady, who looked as though she might have a mind of her own, was getting ready to close the store.

"Hello, Nell!" he called out familiarly as he entered. "I jest thought I'd drop in an' see yer, bein's I had some business that brought me to town to-night."

"Yes, I reckon ther business you had was to git drunk!" was the quick retort. "You're putty well that way now, Horse Shoe Harry."

"Never mind, now, Nell. A feller's bound to git in a little bugjuice once in awhile."

"Yes, but you do it oftener than once in awhile; you git drunk every time you strike town. Between your chewin' plug tobacker an' gittin' full of bad licker, I've jest made up my mind that you ain't fit to keep company with me."

"Yer don't mean that, Nell."

"Yes, I do mean it."

"Well, it ain't ther tobacker an' whisky what's made you change your mind, then; it's somethin' else."

"What else is it, then?" and there was just a sparkle of triumph in the girl's dark eyes.

"There's another feller in ther game, Nell. I heard about it, an' now I want you to tell me who it is!"

"Well, I'll tell you who it is if it will do you any good. He ain't as big as you are, but he's all there, when it comes to a man who knows how to court a gal."

"What's his name?" and the brow of the Cowboy King wrinkled slightly.

"He goes by ther name of Smiles, an' it's a good name fur him, 'cause——"

"What!" thundered the Texas Terror; "that half-cooked shrimp from Bangs' ranch! You don't mean that, do yer, Nell?"

"That's jest what I mean, I reckon," and she stamped her foot and put on a pout that was very aggravating to the big man.

"All right, Nell," he answered, trying hard to keep cool. "All right! What you've jest said seals ther doom of Smiles. I'll make a sieve outer him afore he's twenty-four hours older, see if I don't!"

"Don't you dare!" and Calico Nell brought her foot down sharply. "Don't you dare to go an' make a target of Smiles. If you was to hurt one hair in his head I'd kill you!"

The big villain stepped back and looked at her with a feeling that was of awe, intermingled with admiration.

"Git out!" he blurted out. "Don't talk that way, Nell. Give us a kiss an' we'll call it square."

The answer to this was a sharp slap, and, swallowing his rage, the Cowboy King hastened from the store.

"I reckon I'm in fur it fur fair now," he muttered, as he headed for the saloon. "Well, there's four fellers what has got to go under, an' Smiles is one of 'em!"

CHAPTER V.

THE TEXAS TERROR GETS A DUCKING.

Young Wild West and his two partners did not stay in the bar of the hotel very long after the Cowboy King and his friends went out.

They had covered a big lot of ground that day, and they were pretty well tired out.

So they sought the beds assigned to them, and were soon asleep.

It was quite a change to them to occupy beds, as they had been sleeping on the ground in the various places they had camped for the past week.

As they had nothing particular on hand, they did not get up until about seven the following morning.

Then, after a hearty breakfast, they took a walk about the town.

"Goslin' is quite a place," remarked Cheyenne Charlie. "But it ain't up to Weston, not by a jugful!"

"It's an entirely different sort of a place from Weston," retorted Jim Dart. "There isn't such a thing as a mine to be seen here, and that makes it look strange enough."

"Well, Gosling is a sort of prairie town where the ranchers make a sort of headquarters," spoke up Wild. "There are no cities within a hundred miles, and that makes a town like this do quite a business."

There was quite a big cattle yard in the place, too, and it was evident that those who were doing business there were making it pay.

As they came back to the hotel they were stopping at, after making the rounds of the town, they were rather surprised to see the little cowboy called Smiles just coming from the dining-room picking his teeth with the point of his bowie knife.

"Why didn't you go back with the boys last night?" asked Wild.

"No; I had to see a young lady I'm sorter sweet on," was the reply, and his face turned red.

"And you sat up a little late, I suppose," added Jim.

"Well, yes, it was nigh onto two when I turned in. I'll tell you something!" and he turned to our hero.

"Well, what will you tell me, Smiles?"

"Ther Cowboy King has marked me to go down."

"Is that so?"

"Yes."

"How do you know?"

"See that little store over there with ther fancy things in ther winder?"

"Yes."

"Well, there's a very nice gal what keeps that store, an' to tell yer ther truth about it, I'm in love with her, an' she's in love with me, 'cause she told me last night an' I told her."

"I see."

"Yes. You know, Horse Shoe Harry has been tryin' to shine around ther gal fur some little time, but he never could make much headway. Ther gal is called Calico Nell."

"Calico Nell, eh?"

"Yes, but I jest calls her Nell fur short. Well, last night I went out of here kinder sudden-like, you know."

"Come to think of it, you did," replied our hero. It wasn't a great while after the gang from Dixon's ranch left."

"No; an' I wish it had been a little sooner, 'cause if it had I would have shot ther Cowboy King, an' then that would have put an end to ther Texas Terror."

"What happened?"

"Oh, he went over to the store jest as she was closin' up an' demanded to know who ther feller was what she liked better than she did him. Then she up an' told him it was me. She's awful spunky-like, you know, an' she wasn't afraid of him. He went away swearin' that he was goin' to fill me full of holes afore twenty-four hours was over."

"He did, eh?"

"Yes."

"Well, you don't want to allow him to do anything like that."

"Oh, I'm goin' to be on ther watch fur him. When we meet lead is goin' to fly, I reckon. I ain't goin' to stand still an' let him make a sieve of me without givin' him some back, I kin tell yer. He might be able to shake ther lights out of me, but I don't believe he kin shoot a great deal straighter than I kin."

"Well, the chances are that you will meet this afternoon at the shooting match, then, if you are going to attend it."

"Oh, I ain't goin' back to ther ranch till after that's over. I'm goin' to take a day off."

"Well, we will be at the shooting match, too. We are going to enter it just to help the widow along. What is the prize, do you know?"

"Yes, there's two prizes. Ther first is a rifle an' ther second is a new Colt's revolver. Ther entrance fee is five dollars, but that's jest to make some money fur ther widder, you know."

"Oh, yes, I understand that. They thought they would put up the prizes just to make a little excitement, I suppose."

"Yes, 'cause there's a whole lot around who think they kin shoot straight with a rifle. I'm a putty good shot myself, but I don't reckon on winnin' either ther first or second prize."

"You can't tell what you might do."

"No, that's so. But I reckon you'll be ther one to beat 'em all. You're ther Champion Deadshot of ther West, so what's ther use of anyone tryin' to beat you?"

"Well, there's plenty who ought to be able to do as good. What's the range?"

"A hundred yards, an' a cigar box is goin' to be ther target."

"Cigar box, eh?"

"Yes. I heard one of 'em say there was goin' to be a

hole cut in ther lid of ther box an' a cigar stuck in it, so ther point is toward ther shooter. Ther feller what hits ther cigar is likely to win ther first prize, I reckon."

"He'll have to be a mighty good shot to do it," spoke up Cheyenne Charlie.

"Somebody said they heard ther Cowboy King say he could do it."

"Well, if he is the only one who does it before I shoot I'll do the trick myself," said Wild. "Then we'll shoot off the tie, providing no one else does it."

"I'd give a whole lot to see it happen that way."

"Well, I guess it will happen that way, if the Cowboy King is an extra good shot."

After a little further conversation with the little man our friends started out to look at a herd of bronchos that were corraled a few miles outside of the town and were for sale.

Wild thought it would be a good idea to look at all he could and get prices on them.

While he liked the way Bangs talked, there was no use in spending money recklessly.

They went out and had a look at the herd and got prices.

There was little difference between them and the price they had received from Bangs, so they concluded to give the ranchman the benefit of the sale.

They rode back to the house occupied by the owner of the horses to tell him that they would think over the matter, and they were surprised to see Horse Shoe Harry, the Cowboy King and Texas Terror, there.

He was talking with the boss about the horses, too, and before Wild could get a chance to tell him that he had looked over the herd and would think it over, the big cowboy said:

"Your herd of cayuses is as good as sold, Barkalew; Mr. Dixon told me to tell you that."

"Well, I'll have to let ther young feller have somethin' to say; he spoke about it," retorted the man.

"What do yer want to let him have anything to say about it fur? You said you would take what Dixon offered yer yesterday, didn't yer? You ain't goin' back on it now, I hope."

"There is no need of his going back on it," spoke up our hero. "I guess we don't want the horses."

"Well, you needn't git so sassy about it!" exclaimed Horse Shoe Harry.

"See here!" said Wild. "It seems that you are not satisfied to let me alone yet. Now, if you don't keep a civil tongue in your head I'll throw you in that water hole down there!"

There was a pool a few yards distant at the foot of the hill, and it was this that our hero referred to.

Several men employed on the ranch were standing about, and when they heard the Texas Terror talked to in that way they were very much surprised.

The chances are that they expected to see the boy handled rather roughly, if not shot.

The face of the big villain turned all colors.

"If you keep on, Young Wild West, I'll have to give you your medicine!" he ventured to say.

"You will, eh?"

Then something that was really surprising happened.

Our three friends quickly dismounted.

Young Wild West caught the Texas Terror just right, and with a powerful shove got him over his head.

Then, holding him with one hand, he stepped to the water-hole.

"You are going to take a ducking!" he said.

Splash!

The cowboy struck the water and went under.

Our hero folded his arms and stood still on the bank till he came up.

The water-hole was not more than three feet deep, and, gasping and sputtering, Horse Shoe Harry crawled out.

He had lost his temper completely now.

"I'll kill you for that, Young Wild West!" he cried, drawing his knife. "You've gone over ther limit, an' I'll kill you if I go under ther next minute fur it!"

He made a rush at Wild, but the boy nimbly jumped aside.

Then a right swing landed behind the ear of the Cowboy King and he fell upon his face.

"You're a fine fellow to be called a Texas Terror, I must say!" exclaimed Wild, as he seized him by the collar and raised him to his knees. "Take that for good measure!"

A blow caught the villain squarely on the mouth and out went three or four of his teeth.

"Don't! Don't!" he cried, as he rolled over on the ground. "I've got enough. I'm goin' to be your friend, Young Wild West. I'll do anything you say."

"All right, then. Get up, and mind your own business hereafter. I am surprised to hear that you ever got the name of the Texas Terror. You might be a sort of cowboy king, in a way, but where the terror part comes in I can't see."

"Well, by ginger!" ejaculated the man who owned the horses. "Am I dreamin', or what? Kin it be possible that it was Horse Shoe Harry what got handled like that?"

"I guess that's about the size of it," answered Wild, smiling at him. "This is not the first time we have met, you know. If we keep on meeting and the Terror continues to bother me there will be a job for the undertaker."

"It's all off, Young Wild West," spoke up the dripping villain. "I don't want to be bad friends with you, an' I ain't goin' to. I heerd that you was goin' to go in ther shootin' match this afternoon, an' if you are, I want to try an' beat yer. But it is all goin' to be done in good part."

"All right; I'll go in the shooting match just on your account."

"An' your pards will go in, too, won't they? We want to raise all we kin fur ther widder."

"Yes, I guess they'll enter."

Our hero could not help laughing at the way the big coward acted.

Still, he did not believe he was sincere.

Quite enough had happened to convince him of that.

But he was going to let it go at that, for the present, anyhow.

Horse Shoe Harry had been sent over to buy the herd of horses by Dixon, because Dixon had heard that Young Wild West was in the market for five or six hundred.

He had the option of buying the herd from Barkalew at a much lower figure than Bangs was asking our hero, and he figured that it would be a good thing to close the deal and then sell at a good profit at a price lower than Bangs placed on his horses.

But when he came to close the deal Barkalew went up on his price on account of there being another probable buyer.

But as Wild had told him that he did not want the horses, Barkalew closed the deal with Horse Shoe Harry as soon as our friends started back for the town.

"I've run up ag'in lots of queer fellers in my day," observed Cheyenne Charlie, as they rode along, "but I think this Texas Terror feller beats 'em all."

"He is a hard one to understand," Jim Dart admitted.

"Well, I guess we know him pretty well by this time," said Wild.

They went back to the hotel and decided to take things easy until the shooting match took place.

After dinner they cleaned their rifles and got things in shape and then went into the bar-room and paid the entrance fee to the proprietor, who had been appointed as the person to collect.

He took a big interest in the welfare of the widow, because her husband had been a good customer of his, he said.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SHOOTING MATCH.

When the time came for the shooting match to take place a big crowd had assembled on the wide stretch of ground in the rear of the hotel.

As the town was a central trading-point for several ranches, there were more cowboys than any other set of men, by far.

By this time the fame of Young Wild West had been spread among them, and every man of them was anxious to see the dashing young fellow who had tamed a Texas Terror.

Some of the cowboys had heard of Wild and his partners, for there was scarcely a part of the country west of the Mississippi where they were not known by someone.

The contestants were to shoot in accordance with the way they had entered the contest.

That brought Young Wild West, Cheyenne Charlie and Jim Dart well down toward the bottom of the list.

Over fifty paid the fee of five dollars to help the widow along, so she was bound to realize a neat sum.

The prizes being donated by the business men of the town, she would get the whole amount.

The cigar box that was to be used as a target was according to the idea of an ingenious sort of a fellow named Dickens.

He was the blacksmith of the town, and acted as a sort of lawyer for those who got into trouble at the same time.

A hole was cut in the center of the box just large enough to permit the end of a cigar to stick through.

Around this a circular piece of white paper was pasted, so the end of the cigar would show plainly.

Dickens showed the target to the contestants before he fastened it to a tree.

"I've got half a dozen more boxes ready," he remarked. "'Cause it ain't likely many shots will be fired afore this one gits riddled. A hundred yards ain't no great distance, you know, an' almost any of ther boys could plug a horse thief that fur off at ther first shot. Anyone what kin do that most likely kin hit ther cigar box."

"It's a fifty-cent cigar that goes in that box," added the hotel-keeper. "I'll furnish new ones as fast as they are shot away."

"You won't be out a whole lot, I reckon," spoke up Cheyenne Charlie, with a grin and shrug of his shoulders. "'Tain't every man what kin hit ther end of a cigar at a hundred yards."

"That's jest what I was thinkin'," nodded the landlord.

"Well, I'll bet a hundred that more than one cigar has to be used!" exclaimed Smiles, stepping up.

"I'll go yer!" promptly replied the landlord.

The money was placed in the hands of Wild, who agreed to hold it.

More wanted to bet the same way, but the landlord said he was not a betting man, and had only taken the wager for the fun of the thing.

Everything being in readiness, the first man was called up to shoot.

As each had only one chance for his five dollars, it was necessary that he had to get right down to his level best.

The first man hit the box, and that was all.

And so it was until the thirteenth man stepped up.

He happened to be the blacksmith who had made the unique target.

His bullet cut a hole so close to the cigar that it dropped out.

But the wrapper of thin tobacco was not broken, so the cigar did not have to be replaced.

"I come putty near winnin' ther bet for Smiles," he said, with a grin. "But never mind! There's better shots than me here."

"Maybe there is," answered the landlord. "I reckon Young Wild West is about ther feller what will riddle ther cheroot. But there ain't anyone else as will do it."

"You jest wait!" spoke up the Cowboy King, who had

been rather quiet up to this time. "I'll sorter s'prise yer when I shoot, I reckon."

"All right. Do yer best, Harry."

The Texas Terror, as we shall still call him, was the twenty-third man on the list.

The cigar remained untouched until he stepped up.

Then the big villain took careful aim and pulled the trigger.

"She's hit!" cried the man attending the target. "You couldn't scrape up half a pipeful of tobacker out of what's left of ther cigar!"

The cowboys from Dixon's ranch let out a yell that made the welkin ring.

Smiles, who was grinning, as usual, turned to the landlord and remarked:

"I didn't want to see that big galoot hit ther cigar, but I reckon I'm goin' to be a sure winner now, 'cause Young Wild West will plug ther next cigar if I don't myself."

"I have lost ther bet, anyhow," was the reply. "There's got to be more than one cigar used, ain't there? One is done fur an' I've got to put up another one."

"Well, I'll make it more than two if you want to let it go that way."

"No! I've lost. Collect your money."

Wild paid the bet to Smiles and then watched the next man shoot.

But he did not hit the target at all, as several had done before him.

Finally it came the turn of Smiles.

The little cowboy almost ceased to smile when he toed the mark.

He took a quick aim and fired.

"Hooray!" yelled the man at the target. "There goes another cigar!"

Smiles puffed up with pride when he heard this.

"I knowed it," he said.

Another cigar and a new box was now brought into play.

It was the fourth box to be put up, the others having been riddled.

No one hit the cigar, however, and pretty soon it came Jim Dart's turn.

Jim was an excellent shot.

He fired, and the cigar went flying into bits.

"That's ther third one!" yelled the target-tender.

Cheyenne Charlie was next.

He, too, hit the bull's-eye with the greatest of ease.

"That's four!" came from the direction of the target.

The landlord's eyes were opened wide.

"I reckon I was a fool to make sich a bet as I did," he observed to our hero.

"Well, I thought so at the time. But it was none of my business," was the reply.

"Now, it's your turn."

"Yes"

"Well, let me see you spile another fifty-cent cigar."

"I'll try."

Young Wild West stepped up, his sombrero pushed far back on his head.

He was the most dashing and handsome-looking one of all the contestants, and the crowd uttered a cheer as if by mutual consent.

Wild bowed to them and then raised his rifle to his shoulder.

He knew that there was not one in that crowd who did not expect to see him hit the cigar.

And he was going to hit it, too!

He took a quick aim and pressed the trigger.

Crack!

The cigar was gone.

"He makes ther fifth!" shouted the target-man.

There were but three or four to shoot now, and when they were through the sixth cigar was untouched by a bullet.

There was a tie to shoot off now, and Young Wild West, Cheyenne Charlie, Jim Dart, Smiles and the Cowboy King were the ones to do it.

As Horse Shoe Harry was the first to hit the cigar, it was up to him to lead off in shooting the tie off.

The landlord brought out half a box of cigars now.

"I reckon ther fifty-cent cigars will be on ther run now," he remarked. "But I ain't goin' to squeal. Let her go!"

The Cowboy King fired and missed!

Those in the crowd who were opposed to him let out a yell of delight.

Smiles then stepped up and hit the cigar.

A rousing cheer went up, for the little cowboy was quite a favorite.

"I reckon Jim an' me had better miss, Wild," said Charlie, in a whisper. "You win out an' let Smiles git ther second prize."

"Yes, but someone will have to drop in for third, though."

"Well, let Jim do it, then."

The scout was satisfied to let the prizes go.

He knew he could hit a cigar at that distance about as often as the next one, but he didn't want to shoot against Wild.

It would be a continual tie until a more difficult shot was proposed.

Then Young Wild West would be bound to win.

Jim shot and also hit the cigar.

Then our hero took his turn and did it.

That left three tied for first place.

"Boys," said Wild, turning to Jim and Smiles, "what do you say if we draw lots to see who takes the prizes? There is no need of us keeping on shooting off the tie. It might be that we would spoil all the cigars the hotel man has got!"

"I am satisfied!" exclaimed Smiles, eagerly. "I'd rather take my chances that way than to keep on shooting."

"So would I!" declared Dart.

"All right, then. Now, here are three matches. One I will leave the full length and the other two I will break off,

one a little shorter than the other. We will let the landlord, or anyone else you may choose, hold the matches, and then we will draw. The one who gets the full-sized match takes the first prize, the next in length wins the second, and the short one the third. Are you satisfied to that?"

"Oh, yes!" answered the little cowboy.

Jim was, of course.

He did not care about either of the prizes.

Wild soon arranged the matches and handed them over to the hotel-keeper.

Then they each drew one, and it resulted that Smiles drew the long match!

He had won the first prize.

Jim got second and Wild third.

"Ther best shot in ther three gits ther smallest prize!" exclaimed the landlord. "That's rather curious, ain't it?"

"Well, there is no one more satisfied than I am," said our hero. "But just for the fun of the thing I will show you fellows what I can do in the line of shooting with a rifle, anyhow."

"Good!" cried the blacksmith.

"But how kin you do any better than that?" asked the landlord of the hotel.

"I'll show you. Just give Cheyenne Charlie one of those cigars, please."

"Sartin I will!" and he handed it over.

Then the scout coolly scratched a match and lighted it.

"Get a good ash on it, Charlie," observed Wild. "I am going to show them how I can knock the ash from your cigar. But I won't take the chance of doing it a hundred yards off. I want to be near enough to distinguish the difference between the cigar and the ash. You see, I don't mean to hurt the cigar any. Suppose you stand over here by this tree? That will be about a hundred and fifty feet, I think."

"A little more, I should jedge," nodded the blacksmith.

"Well, that will do, anyhow."

The scout puffed away and Wild wiped his rifle and got it in shape.

He had done such things before, and Charlie was not the least bit nervous about standing by the tree with the cigar in his mouth to have the ashes knocked off by a bullet.

Pretty soon the ash was a little over an inch long.

"I reckon this will do," said Charlie.

"All right. Get over there by the tree."

It seemed that the Cowboy King was the most interested of any man in the crowd.

He watched the proceedings eagerly.

In a couple of minutes Charlie had taken his position with his side toward Wild and called out that he was ready.

Then our hero placed the butt of the rifle to his shoulder and took aim.

Crack!

The majority of the cowboys had gathered on both sides of the scout so they could see good, and as the report rang out a loud shout went up.

The ashes had been knocked from the cigar as neatly as though it had been flipped away with the snap of a finger.

While the crowd was cheering the daring deadshot the Cowboy King stepped up to Wild and said:

"We're good friends, but I'll bet you a hundred that I kin do that same thing!"

There was a peculiar glitter in his eye that Wild did not like.

CHAPTER VII.

HORSE SHOE HARRY DOES SOME PLOTTING.

"So you think you could do it, eh?" Young Wild West asked, looking Horse Shoe Harry straight in the eyes.

"Yes, or I wouldn't want you to bet me a hundred that I couldn't," was the reply.

"Who would you get to hold the cigar in his mouth for you?"

"Why, ther same one as held it for you," was the reply.

"Not by a jugful!" exclaimed Cheyenne Charlie. "I don't feel like dyin' jest yet."

The countenance of the self-styled Texas Terror fell.

"You'd be afraid I'd miss ther ashes on ther cigar an' hit you, hey?" he said.

"Yes, you might do it accidentally on purpose, as they say."

"I don't see why you should think anything like that. I told you fellers I wanted to be friends with yer."

"I know you did. But I've seen sich measly coyotes as you before. I kin read 'em right through, I kin! I'll admit that you're a putty hard one to read, but I kin manage to do it, jest ther same."

"I guess you think I ain't a good enough shot to let me try it," said the villain, keeping his composure and not showing the least sign of anger. "Would you let anyone but Young Wild West try ther shot on yer?"

"No! I wouldn't even let Jim Dart try it. It takes a wonderful cool feller to do that trick. I'm satisfied that if I let you try it I'd git a bullet right through my head."

"Well, I will let you try it on me."

"No, you won't! I don't want to try ther shot.

"Will you try it on me?" he asked, turning to Wild.

"There is no particular reason that I should," was the retort. "Why do you ask me to do it?"

"Jest to show that I ain't afraid of you shootin' me."

"Well, I'll tell you what I'll do, then. You put a lariat around your neck and hang yourself from the limb over your head, and I'll step back a hundred and fifty feet and cut you down with a bullet just before you are strangled."

The Cowboy King looked hard at him, and then turned and walked away.

"I reckon you think I don't mean what I say when I tell yer I want to be friends with yer," he observed.

"Well, I guess you understand me pretty well; I know I do you."

"Let it drop, won't yer?"

"Certainly. I shan't bring it up again."

The Texas Terror did not remain about the hotel very long after that.

He went over to the tough saloon, followed by two of his closest friends.

"Boys," said he, as they sat down at a table in the rear of the place, "I've got to be square with Young Wild West an' his two pards afore ther sun rises to-morrer mornin'. An' Smiles has got to go under along with 'em. It won't be ther first time that I've sent a feller to his long home when I do this. But ther fact is that them four has got to die!"

"All right," answered one of them. "You kin count on us to help you, I reckon, can't he, Bill?"

"You bet he kin, Tom! Ther Cowboy King has been a friend to us, an' we'll stick to him fur it."

"I'm glad to hear that, boys!" nodded the big villain. "Now I'll tell yer what I meant to tell yer last night. It's about Calico Nell, boys. You know her."

They nodded in the affirmative.

"Well," he went on, "I'm a little sweet on her, as maybe you've noticed."

"We've noticed it," said Bill.

"You bet we have!" chimed in Tom.

"Well, boys, Calico Nell has gone back on me, an' she's took up with that half-cooked shrimp of a Smiles!"

"What!"

The other two villains showed genuine surprise.

"It's a fact, boys. That's why I said Smiles has got to go under, along with Young Wild West an' his pards."

"I don't blame yer, Harry."

"Ther idea of that feller cuttin' you out!"

"Well, he has cut me out, 'cause she told me so with her own mouth."

"Why don't you marry her, anyhow?" suggested Bill.

"That's what!" exclaimed Tom.

"By jingo! I never thought of that. I reckon I could git hold of her an' sneak her over to ther ranch. Ther boss an' his wife has gone down to El Paso fur a week, an' I'm in charge of ther ranch. Jingo! I never thought of that! I reckon it kin be did, boys. An' I reckon it will be did. But them four skunks has got to be done away with, too, an' there's no mistake about that!"

"Well, you jest tell us what to do an' we'll do it."

"Well, then, to-night when Calico Nell is closin' her store we'll git her an' sneak her over to ther ranch. An' if that little shrimp is around there he'll git filled full of lead."

"Good enough!"

"You bet!"

"You two kin stay around here till that time. I'll send ther rest of ther boys back to ther ranch, 'cause I don't want 'em to know about it."

Then the three villains shook hands over it.

It was surely a villainous compact, but the question was: Would it work?

While they were seated in the saloon a queer-looking rig drove up to the door.

It was the covered wagon drawn by a team of mules that Young Wild West and his partners had passed the night before on their way to Gosling.

Somehow the peddler of Yankee notions had branched off on a trail that led to a ranch to the west of the town, and he had remained there until this afternoon.

But the peddler was full of business the minute he entered the saloon.

Probably he would have stopped at the hotel if he had seen it first, but he came from the wrong direction for that.

"Hello, all hands!" he cried, as he came in. "Gee-whizz! but it's hot, ain't it? Ten thousand clams, ten thousand dollars! Come up, everybody, an' hev a drink!"

There was a rush for the bar as this invitation was given, the Cowboy King and his two comrades joining in, as a matter of course.

The peddler wore a long linen duster and a battered white plug hat, and with the bunch of yellow whiskers on his chin he looked decidedly comical.

He even made a more comical appearance now than he did when our friends met him the night before.

But that was his way of advertising his business.

A town like Gosling was worth considerable to him, generally.

The bullet-headed man behind the bar put out the drinks in short order.

When all had swallowed their potations the peddler suddenly gave a start and then began shaking his head.

"Great parsnips!" he exclaimed. "I've made an awful mistake, fellers. Ten thousand clams don't 'mount to ten thousand dollars, 'cause they was only bringin' two dollars a thousand when I left ther good old state of Vermont. Gee-whizz! Everybody pay fur his own drink!"

There was such a doleful, worried expression on the man's face that the majority of the men really believed that he had made a big mistake.

But the man behind the bar did not think that way.

He had been around the country pretty well and was up to all sorts of games.

"Jest fork over ther money fur them drinks!" he said, in an ugly tone of voice. "Four dollars an' fifty cents will jest pay ther bill."

"Hey? Do yer mean that, mister?" cried the peddler. "Yu be makin' fun, ain't you?"

"You'll find out I ain't makin' fun if you don't fork over ther money putty quick. You ordered drinks fur all hands, an' now you've got to pay fur 'em."

"No, siree! I didn't order drinks fur all hands. I jest said ten thousand clams was ten thousand dollars, an' then I said everybody step up an' hev a drink. If it was wrong about ther clams it must have been wrong about ther drinks, too."

"No, it ain't. You didn't have ther clams, but you had ther drinks. Now pay fur 'em!"

"Gosh! Will yer take trade?"

"Trade?"

"Yes, suspenders, collar-buttons, underclothes, shoe-strings, socks, spectacles, overalls, neckties, paper collars, combs, jewsharps——"

"Have you got all them things in that wagon of yourn?" interrupted the bartender, calming down considerably.

"I reckon I has, mister, an' more besides."

"Well, s'pose you show us what you've got?"

"I'll du it, by gosh!"

The next minute every man who had taken a drink at the invitation of the peddler stepped out to the wagon.

As he had things that would just appeal to the fancy of men of their class, he began making sales right and left.

And the bartender was the heaviest buyer of the lot.

But the best part of it was that he seemed to forget all about the bill that had been run at the bar by the peddler, and he paid for the things he bought.

But the Yankee had such a way about him that he generally had the money from his customers before they really got hold of the goods.

"Gents, my name is Simon Slow, an' I'm a poor unfortunate Down Easter what's got more brains than money!" the eccentric character exclaimed. "I'm much obleeged fur helpin' a poor feller along. Now, then, who wants this double-breasted ganzy? It's guaranteed to be all wool, an' it will keep out ther cold in winter an' ther heat in ther summer. Ther longer you wear it ther better it will fit yer, an' ther more whisky an' backer juice you drop on it ther stronger it'll git! Who wants it fur five dollars now?"

There was not a man there who had any earthly use for a garment of that kind, but three were sold in no time.

The Cowboy King was one of the purchasers, too.

He was very much amused, as the quaint Yankee made him forget his troubles for the time being.

Before the Yankee got through with them he got in the neighborhood of fifty dollars, and then, when he saw there was not much chance of getting anything more from them just then, he shut the door in the back of the wagon and locked it.

"Ten thousand clams, ten thousand dollars!" he cried. "Everybody have a drink!"

He led the way inside, and then put the money upon the bar to pay for two rounds.

"Ther best thing yu kin du, bartender, is tu take out fur that other drink," he observed with a smile. "I be an honest man, an' I wouldn't steal a corn husk frum a lame goat with ther glanders!"

"All right," was the reply! "I'll take it out. Fill up, now! Then we'll all have somethin' on me."

The peddler seemed to like to drink as well as any of them, and he laughed and talked unceasingly.

But after awhile he went out and got into his wagon.

Then he rode over to the hotel.

"That's a great rig, ain't it?" said Horse Shoe Harry to his two rascally companions.

"Yes," was the reply from Tom. "It would be jest ther rig fur a feller to start across ther plains with his bride, wouldn't it, Bill?"

"I reckon it would."

"You don't think it would be a good idea fur us to git ther wagon to put ther gal in when we take her to-night, do yer?" asked the big cowboy.

"No!" and Tom shook his head. "You ain't goin' any further than Dixon's ranch, so you won't need that wagon."

"I have an idea that I might have to go further, though."

"What makes you think that way?"

"I might get chased by somebody."

"Who would do it, Harry?" asked the villain, Tom.

"Well, s'pose we don't git a chance to drop Smiles afore we git away with Calico Nell?"

"We'll drop him afterwards, then."

"Well, that's so, too. But he might git ther cowboys from Bangs' to help him out, an' then they'd make it kinder warm fur us."

"I'll tell yer what to do!" exclaimed Bill, who was quite an ingenious sort of a fellow, it seemed. "When we put ther finish to Smiles we'll put him where his carcass won't be found. Then it will look as though he's run off with Calico Nell, as neither of 'em will be found."

"Right you are, Bill!" cried the Cowboy King. "I reckon that you've got a putty good brain in your head. You know more'n I do, when it comes to figurin' out things."

"Oh, Bill's putty smart," spoke up Tom. "I'm always proud of him."

"Well, we'll take ther chances to-night, anyhow."

CHAPTER VIII.

A WEDDING TO BE.

It was pretty late in the afternoon when Young Wild West turned to his two partners and said:

"Boys, I guess we had better ride over to Bangs' place and close the bargain for the drove of horses. Then he can be getting them to the nearest railroad depot and ship them to Weston."

"That's right," nodded Jim. "It isn't likely we will be able to buy them much cheaper anywhere else."

"Without it is of ther boss of ther Texas Terror," put in the scout. "He jest wants to git them horses of ther feller we was talkin' to to-day, so's he kin sell 'em to you, Wild. He would make a big profit if he did."

"Well, he can't sell me any horses. When a man tells me once that he wants to sell and sets his price, I expect to have an option, regardless of anyone else."

"Oh, I reckon Bangs is all right, anyhow," said the scout. "You're goin' to give him a good figure fur ther herd of mustangs, and you'll be able to double your money inside of sixty days."

"Well, that is what I want to do if I can. We will need some of the horses in Weston for our men, and the rest will find ready buyers. It is a good way to do, to come down here into Texas and buy your own horses, because there is a whole lot of fun and adventure attached to it."

They reached Bangs' ranch just about in time for supper, and when the ranchman saw them coming he uttered a cheer.

"Just in time, boys!" he cried, as they dismounted. "A rousin' good supper is all ready fur yer. Here, you, Tony, you lazy rascal! Git them horses over to ther stable in a hurry!"

The greaser servant appeared, but he did not move very rapidly, in spite of the command.

But he took the horses and walked away with them.

Wild and his two partners then sought the water and basin that were on the bench at the side of the house.

A good wash with an old-fashioned crash towel to dry on was just the thing before sitting down to eat.

When they were ready the ranchman led them inside and they sat down at the table.

Bangs had not said a word about the herd of horses, nor had they as yet.

But before the meal was over Wild turned to him and observed:

"There are quite a few horses to be bought around here, Mr. Bangs."

"Yes, I reckon there is," was the reply. "It won't take you long to git what you want."

"No, it won't take very long. I have decided to buy of you, so you can get the herd over to the railroad as soon as possible. I'll pay you a good substantial deposit as soon as we are through with supper, and when the horses are in the cars I'll give you the balance."

"I'm much obleeged to yer, Young Wild West. You kin take ther herd of cayuses at ther figure I said, an' I reckon you won't be stuck any at that."

"I hope not," replied our hero, smiling at him. "No one wants to get stuck in making a deal or purchase, you know."

"Oh, of course not."

Just as the supper was over Smiles returned to the ranch.

"Boss," said he, "I've been off all day, but I'd like to have to-morrer off, too."

"Why, what's gittin' over yer?" asked the ranchman. "I'm putty short-handed, as you know."

"Yes, boss, but after to-morrer I'll work all ther steadier, 'cause I'll have somethin' to work fur then."

"Somethin' to work fur?"

"Yes, I'm goin' to git hitched up double."

"Who to, Smiles?" called out Mrs. Bangs from the next room.

"Calico Nell," was the reply. "She sorter reckons as how she's tired of runnin' ther fancy store in Goslin', an' so she's goin' to sell out in ther mornin' to a Yankee peddler what jest got in town. Then we're goin' to git hitched up right away an' make a big blowout of it. I ain't got no money, but as my month is up in three or four days, I reckoned as how you'd 'vance it to me."

"Sartin I'll 'vance ther money," retorted the good-natured ranchman. "I'm always ready to help along a young couple when they make up their minds to hitch up. It's ther best thing anyone kin do—git married. Are you boys married?" and he looked at our friends.

"Charlie is," answered Wild, nodding toward the scout. "Jim and I have not stepped off yet."

"Well, it'll be ther best thing fur yer when you do it."

"That's right," spoke up Cheyenne Charlie.

"Well, we will have to get a little older before we get married," said Jim. "I think a young man should wait until he's twenty-five before he takes such a step. We are only boys, and we couldn't settle down to save us!"

"I've never been able to do that myself," observed the scout. "But my wife thinks it is all right when I go away for a few weeks at a time. I had that understood before I married her. I was to go off on long trips, or short ones, every time I felt like it."

"Well, I reckon it's a good way to have things understood afore you hitch up," the ranchman admitted. "Smiles, you'd better have things all understood afore you git ther minister to tie ther knot. Calico Nell don't believe in a man drinkin' liquor, so I've heard."

"That's right, she don't believe in it, an' I've promised to let ther stuff alone."

"Well, yer want to keep your promise, then. As soon as you break it an' come home full of tanglefoot there'll be war in ther camp, an' I know it; fur Calico Nell has got a will of her own, Smiles."

"I reckon she has. But so long as she makes her will in my favor it'll be all right."

There was a general laugh at this, and then Bangs assured the little man that he could have the next day off.

"I want you all to promise to come to ther weddin'," Smiles said, as he went in to get his supper.

"Where's it goin' to be?" asked the ranchman.

"Well, we ain't exactly decided yet. We'll know to-morrer mornin'."

As the prospective groom said this he looked around the interior of the house in a casual way.

"Why can't you have it here?"

That was just what the little man was wishing for.

"We kin!" he exclaimed. "You an' ther missus jest say ther word an' me an' Calico Nell will get hitched up here to-morrer afternoon."

"You have my consent, Smiles," the ranchman's wife called out from the kitchen.

"An' you kin jest bet your life you've got mine, you little runt!" exclaimed Bangs.

"That settles it, then. I'll go over ther first thing in ther mornin' an' git things ready. I'll jest hire ther parson an' give out a few invitations, while Nell is gittin' her finery in shape. There must be plenty of ribbons on her, yer know, an' they must be all colors, too. I ain't no slouch, an' neither is Nell."

Young Wild West and his friends always liked to see a wedding on a ranch.

They had been present at several, and they had always enjoyed it.

"There's one thing about it," said Bangs. "It will make us a day later in gittin' ther horses to ther railroad, 'cause ther boys will all want ter be at ther weddin', you know."

"All right!" answered Wild. "A day or two won't matter much to us."

The following morning Smiles came to Wild and said:

"Say! I reckon you know all about these here things. What kind of a shirt does I want to have on?"

"As fine a one as you can get," was the reply. "The chances are that you can buy just what you want of the peddler who bought your sweetheart out."

"That's so! I never thought of that. Well, I reckon I'll ride over to Goslin' right away."

"Wait a few minutes and we will ride over with you," said our hero.

"Sartin! I'll only be too glad to have yer."

It did not take Wild and his partners long to get ready, and soon the four were heading for the town.

They soon got there, and brought their horses to a halt in front of the hotel.

"I reckon I'll go an' see Nell right away," said Smiles. "She's an orphan an' has always lived with ther Scroggs family, yer know. Ther Scroggs's live right opposite ther store she sold to ther Yank."

"All right," answered Wild. "You go on over and see her. Then we'll see the Yankee and try to find something nice for you to wear to the wedding."

"Good!"

He went off, but was not gone long before he came back.

"They say she ain't come downstairs yet," he said. "Most likely takin' her time about gittin' up, since it's ther first time she's had a chance in a long time, lessen it was Sunday."

"Well, it is pretty late for a prospective bride to be sleeping," replied Wild. "But it may be that she is not feeling well, and does not want to show herself until the last minute. Come on! We'll go over and see the Yankee, anyhow, and you can get fitted out."

All four of them started for the fancy goods store.

Since purchasing it Simon Slow, as he had introduced himself, had transferred the stock he had in the wagon to the store. The one window in front was completely filled with all sorts of articles liable to attract both sexes.

The man was a shrewd one, and when he had ventured over to the little store shortly after he left the saloon the day before, just to see what was for sale there, he had felt a longing to have it.

It so happened that Smiles was in there at the time and had just closed the bargain to get married.

When the Yankee casually asked Calico Nell if she wanted to sell out she had jumped at the chance and offered the store and contents to him for a low figure.

The consequence was that the sale was made.

Now, when Smiles led the way into the store he was met by Simon Slow instead of the girl.

"Mornin'," said the new proprietor, rubbing his hands. "I want tu sell yu gents somethin' this mornin'. What kin it be?"

"Well, I'm goin' to git married, as you know," retorted Smiles, "so I want to git some kind of a fancy shirt to wear."

"Well, yu couldn't hev struck a place this side of Nu York where yu could du any better than right here, be gosh! Now, I'll show you what I've got in quick order."

He had some very fancy shirts, and Smiles was not long in buying one.

Then he bought a flaming red necktie and a few other minor things.

"I ain't got only my month's pay, or I'd stock up with a double quantity," he said to the storekeeper.

"Gosh! that's too bad. I wish you had two months' pay, then I'd sell yu more goods. This is ther boss store of ther taown, but I don't trust. I wouldn't trust my own brother, gents. It's a very bad thing to do. Now, what kin I sell yu others?"

Our friends made a few purchases just to help the thing along.

In hauling over some of the things he had to sell the Yankee came across a pair of embroidered suspenders.

"Here's what yu ought to have fur yer weddin'," he said, holding them before the little man.

"What ther dickens would I want that harness fur?" demanded Smiles, who had never seen a pair of suspenders worn, much less owned a pair.

Belts answered the purpose in that part of the country.

"Why, them's to hold up your trousers," explained Simon.

"Well, I reckon they won't hold up my trousers!" was the quick reply. "Come to think of it, they does look something like that. But when you showed me 'em first I reckoned you thought I wanted to get buckled to my wife fur fair."

"Where was yu raised, anyhow?" queried the Yankee.

"Right here in ther north part of Texas."

"An' yu never seed a pair of spenders?"

"No!"

"Well, by gosh!"

Our friends could not help laughing.

The shrewd Yankee and the little cowboy were certainly a good team to provoke mirth.

They kept talking away for perhaps five minutes, when suddenly the conversation was checked.

A woman came running across the street in a great hurry.

"Where's ther man they call Smiles?" she asked, excitedly.

"Here I am!" answered the little man.

"Well, I've got somethin' to tell you."

"It ain't somethin' bad, is it?" and his face turned pale.

"Well, I just don't know what to make of it, that's all.

Calico Nell's bed wasn't slept in last night an' she ain't nowhere to be found!"

"Jumpin' Jerusalem!" exclaimed Simon Slow; "ther gal must have eloped with someone!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE ABDUCTION OF CALICO NELL.

The Cowboy King and his two pals waited patiently until the night came.

Then, after eating a hearty supper, they played cards until it was time for the little store to close.

Calico Nell had agreed to remain in charge until closing time to give the purchaser a chance to get things in shape.

When she finally put on her hat and left the store for the last time as its manager, she was in a very happy frame of mind.

She was going to be married on the morrow!

That was something that would make any young lady happy, especially if she loved the man.

And Calico Nell did love the little cowboy who was always smiling.

She was willing to put her savings against his work and go through life arm-in-arm.

But the girl's dreams of the future met with a rude interruption.

Just as she got across the street and was going to enter the house she lived in three dark forms sprang upon her, and before she could utter a cry she was enveloped in a blanket and borne away.

Horse Shoe Harry was certainly getting the revenge he longed for, and the woman he wanted to marry was right in his power now.

The villain mounted his horse and the fair captive was handed up to him, the blanket twisted about her so she could not get her hands free.

In this way the three villains rode over to Dixon's ranch.

The Cowboy King managed to get the girl in the house without anyone but his rascally accomplices knowing it.

There happened to be a room in the attic that was without a window, and it was to this that the villains bore the frightened girl.

"Don't let her know that it's me what's got her," Horse Shoe Harry had whispered at the start. "I may fool her and make her believe I've come to save her. Then she'll marry me easy enough."

Calico Nell was placed in the room and a lantern left there so she would be able to see when she got the blanket off her head.

Then the door was locked and the three cowboys went downstairs.

"Do you know one thing?" said Bill. "I've got a good scheme in my head?"

"What is it?" asked the Cowboy King, eagerly.

"Tom an' me'll put on masks an' go up an' tell ther gal that we're outlaws an' that we've got her off in a big shanty in ther woods. We'll say we're goin' to hold her till someone comes an' pays a thousand dollars fur her release. You kin happen along with a dominie to-morrer, an' then it'll be easy enough to git her to marry yer."

"Jove! But I think you are right, Bill! You have certainly got a whole lot of good sense in that head of yours!"

"I reckon I have got a little."

"You bet he has!" declared Tom.

"Well, now, s'pose we fix up a couple of masks an' go up an' see ther gal?" suggested Bill.

"Do so as soon as possible. There's no need of scarin' her wits out of her," retorted the Cowboy King.

From an old black felt hat the two villains cut a couple of masks and then they went up to the attic.

Horse Shoe Harry followed them.

He wanted to hear what was going on.

Bill knocked gently on the door.

"Let me out of here!" came the reply from within. "I'd jest like to know what this here thing means! You half scared ther life out of me, but I'm gittin' over it now, an' if you fellers don't suffer afore this is over I'll miss my guess!"

Bill unlocked the door and the two entered.

"We've come to tell yer that you needn't be afraid, 'cause you ain't goin' to be hurt. We're outlaws, an' we jest picked you up to hold fur a ransom. We're goin' to make someone pay a thousand dollars afore we let you go away from here. You're in a shanty in ther woods, an' if you was to git outside you wouldn't know which way to strike out to git to Goslin'."

The girl listened to this without a word.

The masks on the faces of the men seemed to awe her considerably.

Then, too, they held their hands on their revolvers.

"You are going to keep me here till a thousand dollars is paid?" she asked. "I don't know who would be likely to pay it, then. I've got that much money, all right, but it ain't here. I reckon if you keep me here till someone comes along an' pays a thousand dollars I'll have to stay a good while."

Then she suddenly burst into tears.

Probably it was because she happened to think that the morrow had been set for her wedding day.

"You jest don't cry, gal," said Tom, who had a shade of tenderness in his breast. "Ther chances are that if we let it be known around Goslin' some feller will come along an' plank down ther thousand."

"But Smiles ain't got no money," she retorted.

"Who's Smiles?" asked Bill.

"Never mind about him!" and the girl put on an air of defiance again.

"You say he ain't got no thousand; ain't there someone you know as has got it? Jest tell us, an' we'll try an' reach him putty quick.

"There ain't no one else as I would want to git me out of here," said Calico Nell. "I'm goin' to marry Smiles to-morrer, an' that's all there is to it! I said I would, an' I'm ther one to stick to my word."

"Well, if you git married to-morrer you'll have to let somebody come along an' pay ther thousand, I reckon. Ain't there no one else you know who would like to marry yer an' pay ther thousand to us at ther same time?"

"Oh, I reckon there's one big galoot what would like to marry me," answered the captive. "But you kin bet your life Horse Shoe Harry won't never marry me!"

"Who's Horse Shoe Harry?" asked Bill, who was really carrying out his part to perfection.

"He's a big galoot of a cowboy who calls himself ther king of 'em all, an' claims to be a Texas Terror. But I heard that Young Wild West has tamed him so that he's afraid of his own shadow. He'd be a putty thing to marry me—Calico Nell, a girl who has got a mind of her own, an' don't you forgit it!"

"Well, I don't know nothin' about it," and Bill shook his head as though he didn't. "But if you can't tell us who to go to an' ask fur ther thousand I don't know how you're goin' to git away from here."

This caused the girl to hang her head again.

After awhile she looked up and said:

"Give me a pencil an' a piece of paper to write on."

Tom hastened from the room to get them.

He came back in a few minutes and then Calico Nell wrote the following:

"Dear Smiles—A gang of bad men has got me, and they want a thousand dollars before they will let me go. Go to Mrs. Scroggs and ask her for the tin box that's in the top bureau drawer in my room. You will find more than enough to pay for my ransom in the box, so make arrangements to get me away from the men. Don't pay a cent till you know I am free, though.

"Yours lovingly,

"NELL."

This note was folded and addressed to Smiles in his right name, which was John Montford.

Then Calico Nell handed it to Bill.

"There!" she exclaimed. "Take that an' git a hustle on you. I'm goin' to git married to-morrer, an' if you fellers is mean enough to take about all ther money I've got, why go ahead an' do it. Ther chances are that you won't have things your own way very long, anyhow. I jest want Young Wild West to hear about this business! I heard Smiles say that he was a regular terror to all evil-doers. Him an' his pards would make you scratch gravel, I'll bet!"

"Maybe he would and maybe he wouldn't," answered Tom.

The girl turned to him angrily.

Then, acting on a sudden impulse, she reached out and pulled the mask from his face.

"Ah!" she exclaimed. "You're one of ther men from Dixon's ranch? Now, I reckon I ain't so bad off as I thought I was. I begin to believe that Horse Shoe Harry knows somethin' about this business."

"I reckon he does, Nell!"

The door opened and the Cowboy King stepped into the room.

He had heard all that had been said, and, not being able to keep still any longer, he stepped in.

Calico Nell was thunderstruck when she saw the big villain before her.

"I thought so!" she cried, after a pause. "So it's you, is it? You want to make me pay a thousand dollars or else marry you, I s'pose. Well, I won't do either one! You jest go to touch me, Horse Shoe Harry, an' I'll kill you!"

The glance that shot from her eyes was one of fire, and the big cowboy drew back instinctively.

"Don't git mad, Nell," he said, pleadingly. "I only done this 'caused I loved yer. I'll do anything in ther world fur yer, gal! Jest look over things now, won't yer?"

"I'll put a knife in you if you don't let me out of here!" screamed the girl.

All her fear was gone, it seemed, and she had suddenly been transformed into a tigress.

Seizing a knife from the belt of Tom, she sprang upon the Cowboy King to make good her threat.

But he got back out of her way just in the nick of time. Out through the door he went in a hurry.

"Come on, boys!" he called out. "Leave her there till she cools off a little."

"Yes, git out of here, or I'll kill ther whole lot of you!" cried Calico Nell, making a lunge at Tom.

They tumbled out in a hurry, and then Horse Shoe Harry slammed the door shut just in time to prevent her from following them.

Calico Nell had certainly mastered them for the present, anyhow.

But she was still a prisoner in the house.

CHAPTER X.

WILD IN THE GARB OF A CLERGYMAN.

If ever there was a surprised man it was Smiles when the woman told him Calico Nell was not in the house.

"She's gone!" he cried. "Where kin she be?"

"She's eloped with someone, I said!" spoke up the Yankee.

"No, she ain't, either. She ain't ther gal as would do anything like that. She's been stole, that's what's ther matter."

"That's jest what I think," said Cheyenne Charlie. "Didn't I hear you say that ther Cowboy King was after her?"

"Yes, an' he told her he was goin' to riddle me, an' you

fellers, too. It's Horse Shoe Harry what's done this, you kin bet all you're worth!"

Young Wild West questioned the woman and found that she had not seen or heard Calico Nell enter the house the night before.

"We went to bed putty early last night, me an' my husband," she said. "But we thought Nell come in as usual, 'cause she said she was so glad that it was ther last night she'd have to 'tend the store when she went over after eatin' her supper. I'm sure she wasn't in the house after that, 'cause there's her things there, jest as she left 'em. She didn't elope with anybody."

The last was spoken with a glance at Simon Slow.

"Oh, I don't believe she did, either," he replied, quickly. "I only said that fur fun. I didn't believe that ther gal was away very far when I said it. Gosh! This is what I call too blamed bad!"

"Well, we had better go and look for the young lady," Young Wild West remarked.

"Where are we goin' to look?" questioned Smiles, whose face was now very pale, while just the vestige of a tear could be seen in either eye.

"We will go over to that saloon across the street and try and find out something first of all."

"That's a putty tough place, an' it may be that there's someone there what knows all about it," ventured Charlie.

"I'll go over with you if you don't mind," said the Yankee.

"Certainly you can go with us," our hero answered.

Slow locked up his store and followed them across to the saloon.

"Mornin', gents!" said the owner of the place, as he rubbed the top of his bullet head in a puzzled way.

Evidently he had no idea why they should come in his place when he knew they were hated by some of his customers.

"Good-morning!" Wild answered. "Let us have some of the best cigars you have in the house, please."

Our hero was going at it in the easiest way.

The cigars were put out and paid for, and then, as he bit off the end of his, Wild looked at the saloonkeeper and said:

"What time did Horse Shoe Harry leave here last night?"

"Jest about ten o'clock, I reckon," was the reply. "Him an' two of his men started for ther ranch at jest about that time, an' I ain't seen 'em since."

"What time did the young lady start across the street from the store?" Wild asked, turning to Simon Slow.

"Jest about five minutes after ten," was the reply.

"Ah! that bears out your idea of it, Smiles. I guess we're on the right track."

"Has anything happened?" asked the saloonkeeper.

"Yes, the Texas Terror, as he styles himself, has carried off Calico Nell."

"You don't mean it?"

There was genuine surprise depicted on the man's face, and our hero decided right then and there that he knew nothing of what had taken place.

"That's jest what's happened!" echoed Cheyenne Charlie. "Now, then, maybe you kin give us a point that will help us find her."

"I'll do all I kin," was the reply. "I don't believe in sich business as that. If Horse Shoe Harry has stole ther gal away he ought to be caught an' strung up like a horse thief. But I did hear that he was kinder sweet on her an' she sweet on him."

"That ain't right!" spoke up Smiles. "She was never sweet on him. He was after her a whole lot, an' when she told him night afore last that she didn't want nothin' to do with him, an' had taken up with me, he said he was goin' to riddle me with bullets. Now, Calico Nell an' me was goin' to git married this afternoon, an' he goes an' steals her!"

"You was goin' to be married to Calico Nell this afternoon, hey?"

The saloonkeeper seemed to be surprised.

"Yes."

"Where to?"

"Over at Bangs' ranch."

"And the wedding will take place to-day, just the same!" exclaimed Wild.

"Do you think we'll find her?" queried the little cowboy, eagerly.

"Yes. Say, bartender, Horse Shoe Harry is foreman of Dixon's ranch, isn't he?"

"Yes, he's got full charge of everything now. Dixon an' his wife has gone to El Paso."

"Ah! Then he has taken Calico Nell over to the ranch. Boys, we'll go over there and get her and take her over to Bangs' in time to have wedding. Smiles, have you made arrangements with the minister yet?"

"No."

"Well, tell me where he lives and I'll go and see him."

"He lives in ther little house what's painted all white," said the saloonkeeper. "He's a putty good sort of a man, too, even if he is ag'in liquor."

"Smiles, you go and get as many of the cowboys as you can and head them for Dixon's, do you understand?" Wild said to the little man. "Wait for us on the trail if you get ahead of us. I'll fix it up with the minister. That wedding has got to come on schedule time, as sure as my name is Young Wild West!"

"An' if Young Wild West says it, it's bound to happen!" declared Cheyenne Charlie.

"Just as sure as you live!" chimed in Jim Dart.

Smiles brightened up.

"All right," he said; "I'll do jest as you tell me to. I'll git ther boys, an' if we git to ther piece of timber a mile this side of Dixon's first, we'll wait fur yer."

"All right; go ahead. You won't have to wait very long."

The little cowboy went out and mounted his horse.

The next minute he was galloping in the direction of Bangs' ranch.

Then, leaving his partners and the Yankee in front of the saloon, Wild mounted and rode down to the white house where the clergyman lived.

Reaching it, he dismounted and went to the door.

A pleasant-faced man of middle age came to the door in answer to the summons and asked what he could do for his caller.

"Are you the dominie?" asked Wild, getting right down to business.

"Yes, sir; I am the Reverend Peter Rightpath," was the reply.

"Very well, sir. We want you over at Bangs' ranch this afternoon at four, then. Please don't disappoint us."

"What is it, a funeral?" asked the good man.

"No, it is a wedding. There may be a funeral or two for you to attend to to-morrow, though."

"I don't understand you."

"Well, a young lady was carried off last night by a villain, and in getting her away from him the chances are that the villain will die. That will make one funeral, anyhow, and before it is over there is no telling how many more there is to be."

Our hero then told the minister just what he wanted of him and received the assurances that he would be at the ranch before four o'clock that day.

He gave him a sum of a money as a little present and then started to go out.

But just then a horseman rode up and hastened up to the front door.

It was a cowboy.

Wild sat down and waited until the minister found what was wanted and came back, looking rather puzzled.

"I am wanted over at Dixon's ranch to marry a couple at two o'clock," he said. "I don't see how I can attend to both. You will either have to put off your wedding for an hour, or the other parties will have to get married a little sooner."

"Well, I didn't expect to officiate at any weddings, but as I am your cousin, and also a clergyman, I will help you out. I will go over to Dixon's and marry the couple there and you can have plenty of time to fill your other engagement."

The good man looked at the boy in amazement, but Wild held up his hand for silence.

"The very girl who was stolen last night is at Dixon's ranch," he whispered. "They are going to try and force her to marry a man she does not want to. Let me go over there with a suit of your clothes on and I will block the game. It is the villain who calls himself the Cowboy King who has carried off the young lady known as Calico Nell, and he is going to force her to marry him, so she can't wed the man of her choice at Bangs' ranch this afternoon."

The Reverend Peter Rightpath was astounded.

But he was a man of good sense and excellent judgment.

Wild quickly explained all he knew about it and what he thought, and he readily agreed to allow him to go over to Dixon's wearing a suit of his clothes.

"I will either be over myself or have one there in my place, who will be able to officiate," the minister told the messenger.

Then Wild quickly put on a suit of the good man's clothes and a false mustache he had taken from a captured bandit a few weeks before.

As the clothes were a trifle too large for him, he donned them over his own.

"You are helping me to block a desperate game," he said to the minister. "If you went over there the chances are that you would have to declare the couple man and wife at the point of a pistol. I'll guarantee that I'll fix things up in style when I get there."

When our hero left the house a few minutes later there was a wonderful change in his appearance.

He was attired in a black suit, high collar and black tie and had on a silk hat.

The hat was just enough too large for him to enable him to put his hair up in it, and with a cane swinging, he left his horse standing in front of the residence of the minister and approached his waiting friends.

"Hello, dominie!" said Cheyenne Charlie, as he halted within a few paces of them. "What's keepin' ther young feller what went after you?"

"Oh, he'll be along soon enough," answered Wild, in his natural voice.

The scout and Jim looked at him in amazement.

They now recognized the handsome face of the dashing young deadshot, as well as his voice.

"What in thunder are you up to?" Charlie gasped.

"Yes, tell us!" chimed in Dart.

"Well, I swan!" ejaculated Simon Slow. "If it ain't Young Wild West I'll eat a bale of hay!"

Our hero quickly told them all about it.

When he had concluded he turned to his partners and said:

"You fellers ride out there and meet Smiles and the rest of the cowboys. I will follow along a little later and join you. Then, after we decide on a plan of action, I will go on to the house ahead of time and ask them if they can't hurry up the wedding, so I can get back to town."

"Good enough!" cried Charlie.

"Here, Jim!" said Wild, suddenly: "you take my horse and I will ride yours over. Horse Shoe Harry would recognize Spitfire right away."

"All right," said Dart. "Say! why can't we all ride out together?"

"Well, we can, I suppose. It won't make any difference if you and Charlie are seen in the company of a clergyman, I suppose."

"You sartinly make a fine-lookin' dominie," said the scout, shaking his head to emphasize his words.

Jim went after the sorrel stallion and mounted him and rode up to them.

Then Wild got on the latter's horse and they all started off.

"Gosh!" exclaimed the Yankee, turning to the saloon-keeper, as the three rode away; "there'll be a lively time at that ranch, I reckon."

"Yes, ther chances is that Horse Shoe Harry will get a bullet through his heart afore ther thing is over. Them three fellers means business, an' they're goin' to let ther thing go right ther way of ther Cowboy King until ther last minute. Then they'll make sudden a change an' come out at ther top of ther heap."

As the proprietor of the saloon said this he nodded and walked back into his place.

Simon Slow followed him.

"Say!" said he, "I'd give quite a little to see what'll happen over at that ranch."

"Well, why don't you go over, then?"

"I ain't got no one to 'tend ther store fur me."

"Git Mrs. Scroggs; she used to do it fur Calico Nell once in awhile."

"I reckon I will, 'cause I've got to see this."

CHAPTER XI.

A BIG SURPRISE.

Calico Nell was kept in the attic-room all night.

It was not until about nine the next morning that the Cowboy King ventured to go up and see her.

"Nell," said he, "there was a time when you used to smile on me. Now, I want you to do it ag'in. I've got quite a little money, an' if you'll jest say ther word we'll git married, an' it won't be more'n a year before we'll have a ranch of our own."

"I'll never marry you, Harry, so there's all there is to it!" she answered, with a stamp of her foot. "I'm goin' to marry Smiles or nobody!"

"Well, it'll never be Smiles, fur I've got his funeral set down fur to-morrer."

"You ain't killed him, have you?" and the girl turned the color of ashes.

"No, not yet. But ther chances is that him an' Young Wild West an' them fellers will be over here lookin' fur you, an' we've put up a job that will kill 'em all in a hurry, an' it'll look as though it was an accident, too. There'll be a whole lot of funerals to-morrer if them fellers does come over here lookin' fur you."

He spoke in a way that told Calico Nell that he meant every word he said.

The poor girl knew not what to do.

"I'm goin' to send over to town fur ther minister, Nell," he ventured half a minute later. "You must marry me, that's all!"

Then he went on down the narrow stairs, locking the door as he went out.

His two assistants were in the big room below.

"Bill," said he, "send a man after ther minister. Tell him to be here about two o'clock. That's ther time I've made up my mind to get married."

"All right," answered Bill, and he got up and went out.

The Cowboy King paced the floor nervously till he got back.

"Has she agreed to marry yer, Harry?" asked Bill.

"No; but she's got to do it. Say! how desperate are you fellers, anyhow?"

"I reckon we kin do about anything," Tom answered.

"Yes, but we don't want to git halters around our necks, either," spoke up Bill.

"That's ther part what worries me some," the Texas Terror admitted. "But I've jest made up my mind to marry Calico Nell if I die ther next minute! Now, I tell you what you kin do, boys; I'll do ther layin' out this time, an' if it suits yer, yer kin do it. Jest git word to ther rest of ther boys that a gang is comin' over from Bangs's to take them cattle we stole ther other night. Bangs's men don't know we did steal 'em yet, but you kin make ther boys think they do. Tell 'em that it's goin' to be a fight to ther death."

"I see," said Bill. "That will be just ther thing! If them fellers do come over a fight will start an' we kin clean 'em out from behind ther trees."

"That's it."

"An' it kin all be laid to ther stolen cattle, which we will be able to prove got among ours without our knowin' it."

"That will be easy to prove."

"Well, that's ther way it will be done, then."

It was near twelve when the cowboy who had been sent for the clergyman came back.

"How about it?" asked the Cowboy King.

"Well, he'll either be here himself or another minister what's visiting him will be here."

"Good! It makes no difference what minister it is. If it is a stranger he might git shot accidentally if he didn't do as we want him."

The messenger had been taken in their confidence now, as it was impossible to keep it from him.

But the rest of the cowboys were ignorant of the fact that Calico Nell was at the ranch.

They had been stirred up with a story to the effect that Young Wild West was coming over there with a gang to clean them out, and they were ready to make a fight for it.

They had stolen the cattle, as has already been stated, but they were ready to fight and declare they did not do it.

Tom had been pretty busy acting as cook, and he now came out and asked when the dinner was to be served.

"We'll wait till ther dominie gits here," was the reply. "He will be in a better humor when he gits his stomach full."

It was about a half an hour after the return of the messenger got back that Bill discovered the clergyman approaching.

He was quite sure that it was the clergyman, but it was really Young Wild West.

Wild was quite sure that they had not seen enough of him to be able to recognize him in that garb, so he rode boldly up to the house and dismounted in a stiff way.

"I am here earlier than the time specified," he said, bowing to the villains. "But I trust it will be all right. My cousin, the Reverend Peter Rightpath, could not come, so my arrival this morning was a fortunate one."

"You bet!" exclaimed the Cowboy King. "What couple is your cousin goin' to marry this afternoon?"

"I believe I heard him say that they went by the appellations of Smiles and Calico Nell. I did not understand what their real names were. Funny ways you have in the wild West."

"Yes, we have awful funny ways here, dominie. But come in an' set down. I'm ther Cowboy King, an' I'm a regular Texas Terror, too! It's me who's goin' to git hitched."

"Ah! I am glad to meet you, Mr. Terror. I trust I will very soon get into the ways of Texas."

"Oh, you'll do that soon enough. Now, I s'pose in ther place where you come from that if ther bride was to git cranky at ther last minute an' say no when ther dominie asks her if she'll have ther man fur better or worse, it's all off an' there's no weddin'?"

"Well, if such a thing should happen I suppose it would be all off, yes, sir."

"Well, out here in Texas an' other parts of ther West if a thing like that happens ther dominie jest goes right ahead with ther ceremony, no matter what she says. Now, ther fact is that ther gal has changed her mind about marryin' me jest because I wouldn't git her a dress with trimmin's of pearls an' sich like. She says she won't have me now, an' I say she will. Of course, after it's done it'll be all right, you know."

"Oh, certainly!" replied Wild, acting his part to perfection. "You need have no fear on my part. I will perform the ceremony whether the young lady wants it or not. I am going to go in accordance with the custom here."

The eyes of the Cowboy King fairly danced with delight.

He thought there would be trouble when the minister got there, but here it was as easy as anything he had ever tackled.

"Bill!" called the big villain. "Jest tell Tom that we'll have dinner in about half an hour. You go up an' tell ther bride to git ready. Tell her ther minister is waitin'."

"All right!" was the reply.

As soon as Bill went up the stairs the Cowboy King arose.

"Dominie," said he, "you jest sit here awhile. I'll go up an' try to git ther gal in a good humor."

"Certainly! I will look at this book on the table while you are getting ready."

Wild picked up the book, but the minute he was alone he went to the window and looked out.

Then he calmly took his handkerchief from his pocket and waved it three times.

This was to let his friends know that he was succeeding finely, and that the ceremony was to take place as soon as possible.

He knew Cheyenne Charlie and Jim Dart would both see the signal, as they were waiting for it.

Behind the trees less than a mile away were about forty of the cowboys from Bangs' ranch, under the lead of Smiles.

They were not to come up until they got a signal from Charlie or Jim, who had worked their way up till they were not more than a hundred yards from the house.

Our hero really figured that the three of them would be enough to block the game, but the cowboys were to be held in readiness in case they were wanted.

But our hero did not know that there was a gang of the cowboys belonging to the ranch lying behind the sheds waiting for the others to come.

If he had he might possibly have averted a fight.

He sat there in the room for perhaps ten minutes, and then he heard a fierce struggle going on overhead.

Then a scream rang out and he began to feel that it was time to act.

But he restrained himself and waited.

Pretty soon the Cowboy King came downstairs carrying the struggling form of the girl.

"Calm yourself, dear young lady," Wild said, looking her straight in the eyes. "No possible harm can befall you."

"Are you a minister?" Calico Nell asked.

"Yes, miss, I minister to the wants of some."

"Well, this scoundrel here, who stole me away from Goslin' last night, says you're goin' to marry him an' me. How about it?"

"Why?" and our hero turned to the Cowboy King, "you didn't tell me you stole the young lady away from her home, sir."

"I know I didn't, dominie," was the reply. "But ther fact is, she used to love me, but don't now. You jest go ahead an' marry us, an' it'll be all right."

"What will be all right?"

"Why, everything. There's a hundred dollars!" and he tossed the money at the supposed clergyman's feet. "Pick that up an' put it in your pocket. Calico Nell has got to be ther bride of ther Cowboy King, an' that's all there is to it! Blood will flow if it don't turn out that way."

"Blood will flow! Oh! say not so!" and the clergyman seemed to have suddenly been taken with the shivers.

"Are you goin' to marry us?"

"Certainly! To the best of my ability I will marry you."

"Take off your plug hat an' go ahead, then."

"If it pleases you I would rather keep my hat on. I have long hair, you know, and it would fall down and make me look unbecoming."

"Well, keep ther blamed old hat on, then. Now, Nell, take hold of my hand."

"I'll put a knife through you!" was the reply, and the girl made an effort to carry out her threat.

"Oh, oh!" and the clergyman ran over to the window and wrung his hands as though looking for a way to get out.

But he was really giving the signal for Cheyenne Charlie and Jim Dart to come.

"You come back here!" cried the Cowboy King, grabbing him by the arm and forcing him to the center of the room. "Now, then, are you goin' to marry us of your own free will?"

"Oh! Yes, yes! Join right hands, please.

Bill and the other man were holding Calico Nell now, and they dragged her up before the supposed dominie.

"My dear young lady, take the man's hand and hold on it tight!" Wild said, as he pushed back his coat and showed the butt of a revolver.

Then the girl understood.

She was very bright, anyhow, and when she noticed the tone of his voice and saw the revolver she realized that he was there to save her.

She seized the hand of the big villain who was so anxious to have her for his bride and held fast to it so tightly that he was astonished.

"Are you ready?" asked Wild, as he fished a pair of spectacles from his waistcoat pocket and put them on.

"Yes!" answered Horse Shoe Harry.

"Are you willing to marry the man called Smiles?" and the supposed clergyman looked sharply at Calico Nell.

"Yes!" she answered.

"Here!" thundered the Cowboy King. "What did you say?"

"Oh! Beg pardon, sir; I was thinking of the couple my cousin was to marry. I will ask another question, then. Calico Nell, are you willing to marry the man beside you?"

"No!" she shouted.

"Well, you won't have to do it, then."

"She won't, hey?" said Horse Shoe Harry.

"No, my friend!"

As Young Wild West said this he pulled out a revolver in either hand.

"What do yer mean, dominie?" gasped the villain called Bill.

"I mean that this young lady shall not be forced into a marriage with a man she does not want. I say she shan't, and when I say a thing I always mean it!"

"Who are you, anyhow?" cried the Cowboy King.

"Young Wild West, at your service!" and off came the silk hat, letting the wealth of chestnut hair down over his neck and shoulders, the false mustache quickly following.

The villains were thunderstruck.

Neither of them moved for the space of a second or two.

Then Bill made a step for the door.

"Stand where you are!" cried Wild, in a ringing voice. "Move another step and you'll be a dead man!"

CHAPTER XII.

CONCLUSION.

Coward as he was, the Cowboy King could not stand there and allow himself to be captured.

When he saw Bill halted so suddenly he dropped to the floor and dove between the villain's legs.

Bill went down with a crash and Horse Shoe Harry reached the door just as Cheyenne Charlie and Jim Dart appeared at the window.

Crack!

The scout fired at him, but he got past the door-frame in time to miss getting hit by the bullet.

Jim's horse was outside, where Wild had left it, and as quick as a wink the Cowboy King was on its back.

Away he went like a shot for the barns.

Before any of our friends got out he swung around one of the buildings and was lost to view.

"Never mind, boys!" said Young Wild West. "Just tie up these two fellows while I get off the minister's togs."

"There's another villain in the house. He's gittin' ther dinner ready!" exclaimed Calico Nell.

The words were scarcely out of her mouth when they saw the man known as Tom running for the outbuildings.

"Don't shoot him, boys," said Wild. "We don't want to shoot any of them if we can help it. We'll just tame them the same as I did the Texas Terror."

A grateful look came over the face of Bill when he heard this.

"I reckon you ain't ther worst young feller in ther world, Young Wild West," he remarked.

"Well, I hardly think I am," answered our hero, as he folded the garments he had removed and placed them on a chair.

Then he calmly donned his own hat and placed the silk one on the clothing it went with.

"You want to see your lover, I suppose?" he said, looking at the girl.

She nodded in the affirmative.

"Get out of the house and go straight down the trail, then. Tell him to take you on his horse and go straight to Bangs' ranch, and to send the rest of the men up here. We want our horse, and we are going to have him if we have to fight."

Calico Nell did not need to be told twice.

She vaulted out of the window with great agility and hurried in the direction of the woods.

Wild picked up a rifle that stood in the corner and went out on the stoop.

He thought the Cowboy King might see her and try to stop her.

But no such thing happened.

Neither he nor any of the rest of the gang showed themselves just then.

Presently Bill spoke up:

"I'll go an' git ther horse fur yer."

"Do you think we could depend upon it that you would?" asked Cheyenne Charlie.

"I'll git it. I've got enough of this game. It was a dangerous one, I knowed, but I didn't think it was going to turn out this way."

"Well, go and get the horse, then!"

Young Wild West cut his bonds as he spoke.

Bill ran off with the speed of the wind.

"If he comes back with the horse you can go," said Jim to the other prisoner.

"He'll come back, all right!" was the reply.

In about five minutes he showed up with the horse.

"Here you are!" he exclaimed.

"All right," answered Wild. "Let the other fellow go, Jim."

Jim did so.

"Where's ther rest of your horses?" asked Bill.

"They will be here directly," Jim told him.

Calico Nell had reached the woods by this time and Wild was waiting for the cowboys to show up.

Pretty soon they came in view.

They came down the road at a swinging gallop, and with them were the horses of Wild and Cheyenne Charlie.

But they were nearly half a mile from the house, when out came the waiting gang from behind the barn and other buildings.

The Cowboy King was with them.

Crack, crack, crack!

They began firing at our friends on the stoop.

Bill and the other man were still there, and they at once got inside.

"I told ther fools to quit ther game," he said. "What's ther matter with Harry, anyhow?"

"There'll be something the matter with him putty soon, I reckon," retorted Cheyenne Charlie, as he got inside and crouched close to a window.

"So he isn't tamed yet, then?" observed our hero.

Just then he saw the big villain take aim that way and fire.

"I guess you had better go down," he thought. "There'll be a whole lot of trouble here if you live!"

He took a quick aim and fired.

The Cowboy King threw up his arms and slid from the saddle.

"I guess he's tamed now!" Charlie chuckled.

"Serves him right," spoke up Bill. "He didn't know when to quit."

"That's jest what's ther matter," observed the other man.

By this time both bands of cowboys were firing.

"One of you fellows go out and tell them that if they want to save their lives they had better quit," said Wild, turning to the two men who had been liberated.

"I'll go," said Bill.

He did go, and managed to make the men understand what he meant.

In a few minutes the men belonging to the ranch withdrew, taking two wounded men with them.

Then our friends walked out to meet those from Bangs' ranch.

As they got there and Wild was mounting his horse the looked around to see if the body of the Cowboy King had been removed from the field.

It was gone!

"I didn't see any of 'em take it, but it ain't there," said the scout.

"That's proof that it is gone," added Jim.

There was no more firing, so they turned in the directi of Bangs' ranch.

Wild did not neglect to bring the clothing of the clerg man with him.

He was going to make the good man take something for the use of them, for they had been the means of rescuing Calico Nell so soon.

It was not quite three o'clock when they got to the ranch, but they found the Reverend Peter Rightpath there in waiting.

When he heard how Wild had fooled the villains he could hardly believe his senses.

"It don't seem possible," he said.

"Well, it is possible, though," Wild answered.

Our friends and the cowboys were given a good dinner and then things were made ready for the wedding.

A wagon had been sent over to the town for the Scroggs family who were to bring the clothing, etc., the bride wanted, so the wedding was to take place punctually at four.

It was just a few minutes of the hour when Simon Slow rode up on the back of one of his mules.

"I heerd about this weddin'," he remarked, "an' I jest made up my mind I was comin' to it, whether I was invited or not. I did want to go an' see ther fun over to Dixon's ranch, but ther lady couldn't 'tend ther store fur me."

"Who's 'tendin' it now?" asked Charlie.

"No one. I jest locked it up. There's only so much stuff to be sold, anyhow, an' I kin sell it some other time. My! ther bride looks fine! You wouldn't think it was ther same gal as sold me ther store!"

Calico Nell certainly did look charming.

It had been a hurried preparation, but she was ready, just the same.

"I guess this wedding won't be interrupted like the other one was," laughed Young Wild West, as he took his place beside Smiles to act as best man.

"Oh! if I had only knowed it was you!" retorted the bride. "I did catch on after awhile, though."

"Yes, you held fast to the Cowboy King's hand, all right."

The clergyman went through the ceremony without interruption, and the happy couple were pronounced man and wife.

Then a cheer went up from the cowboys that fairly shook the rafters.

The next thing was the fiddler!

He was a cowboy fiddler, too, and he knew how to handle the bow pretty well.

"Take your partners fur a quadrille!" he bawled out, as he got his instrument in shape and climbed upon a table where a chair had been placed for him.

There were lots of men there and quite a few ladies, so there was a fine chance for dancing.

While the fun was at its height a big man suddenly came into the room.

He walked right straight for Young Wild West, and some of the cowboys turned pale when they saw him.

"Ther ghost of ther Cowboy King!" exclaimed one.

"No, it ain't no ghost, boys!" the man retorted. "It's me in ther flesh. Young Wild West's bullet hit ther bull's-eye watch I always wear over my heart. It saved my life, boys! I made up my mind that I was comin' over here to 'pologize to everybody. Ther Texas Terror has been tamed, an' I want everybody to kick me and let tobacker juice go over me!"

Our hero was as much surprised as anyone.

He thought he had killed the man, but he was very glad he had not.

"Horse Shoe Harry," he said, putting out his hand, "I think you are sincere in what you say this time. I can tell by the tone of your voice."

"I am, Young Wild West. If you don't believe it jest put a bullet through me! I'm awful sorry fur what I've done!"

There was not the least doubt that a big change had come over the man.

He took the watch from the pocket of his coat and handed it around for inspection.

A bullet was imbedded right in the center of it!

It could never be used as a timepiece again, but as a relic and a souvenir of his narrow escape from death it could not be beat.

Of course, the arrival of the Cowboy King stopped the fun for awhile.

But no one was sorry for it, and when he went out and mounted his horse to ride away even the bride was satisfied that he meant to do right the rest of his life.

Wild talked to the cowboys and advised them not to make it hot for him, unless he did something to warrant it.

"I know he did enough to get a rope around his neck," he said. "But when a man repents of his sins and promises to do better he ought to be given a chance."

"Well, you're ther greatest feller I ever seen!" the Yankee declared. "Ladies an' gents, any man what kin call Young Wild West his friend oughter be a happy one, by gosh!"

Then Smiles proposed three cheers for Wild, and they were given with a will.

The rest of the day and evening was spent in a jolly fashion.

A wedding at a ranch generally means a big time, and this one was no exception to the rule.

Young Wild West and his partners remained at the ranch for the balance of the week.

It was Wednesday when the wedding occurred and it took until Sunday night to get the herd of mustangs to the railroad.

As they left for home Monday morning there was a big crowd to see them off.

Among them was Henry Diggs, alias Horse Shoe Harry, the Cowboy King and Texas Terror.

The man was now respected by many and feared by none, and in the two or three days since he had changed he had found that it was better to be humble than a bluffer with not courage enough to carry out his threats.

"Young Wild West," he said, as he shook our hero's hand, "I was afraid of you ther minute you slapped me in ther face that day. I did want to kill you after that, but I didn't do it. God bless yer, boy! May yer make some more fellers good is all I've got to say!"

"I'll try," said Wild. "Now, goodby all! We're off to Weston. Some day we might visit this part of Texas again, and if we do, I hope we won't run across any man who calls himself a Texas Terror."

THE END.

Read "YOUNG WILD WEST'S POCKET OF GOLD; OR, ARIETTA'S GREAT DISCOVERY," which will be the next number (114) of "Wild West Weekly."

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